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A book of unlikely Saints

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# A BOOK OF UNLIKELY SAINTS

*By*

MARGARET T. MONRO

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A BOOK OF UNLIKELY SAINTS

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Without the permissions so kindly given it would be impossible to give any true picture of recent Saints, or to draw on the best and most recent work on those further removed from us in time.

MARGARET T. MONRO.

## PREFACE

NO Saints are really likely. But some are unlikelier than others.

A girl placed in a convent against her will, for instance, is about as unlikely as anyone to become a Saint, especially when she hankered openly for a "good time," had her cell comfortably furnished, and made it clear that she was going to keep her Rule only as much as respectability forced her to do. It was an unpromising start. And yet, blunderingly and with relapses which increase our respectful sympathy, Hyacintha Mariscotti found her way to that intimacy with God which makes a Saint.

From a rather different angle—a Pope's great-grandson is about as unlikely a candidate as one can conceive for high holiness, especially when he bears the ominous name of Borgia.<sup>1</sup> Yet Francis Borgia, Duke of Gandia, was not only a Saint, but a Saint with a whimsical charm recalling St. Francis of Assisi. Some indeed may consider this the biggest unlikelihood in his story, though they will be wrong; early Jesuits are much more like early Franciscans than conventional mythology has chosen to recognize. Apart from his heredity, St. Francis Borgia is

<sup>1</sup> The debunkers are depriving us of this as of other thrills. The Borgia Pope, Alexander VI, has been proved to be the victim of a whispering campaign, launched against him by the Roman nobility in revenge for the way he, a Spaniard, had curbed their not noticeably just ambition. Thus the most sensational chapter in the story of the Renaissance Papacy has been relegated to the limbo of discredited myth. Alexander VI was not a saintly character, but neither was he a bad man; his reputation has been deliberately blackened by spite. His career showed him a diplomatist not only more skilful but more upright than his lay opponents. It is, however, too much to expect public opinion to relinquish the pleasures of moral horror merely because they have no foundation in fact. Agreeable horror is thus bound to be still a factor in men's reaction to Alexander's great-grandson, Saint Francis Borgia.

"unlikely" in more important ways; he was that *rara avis* among the Saints, a good family man. While the devoted wife and mother is a fairly common saintly type, I can think of no one but St. Thomas More to match him as a good husband and father. St. Francis adored his wife, deeply mourned her loss, watched tenderly over the upbringing of his children, and died, General of the Jesuits, with the names of his boys upon his lips. And on a less elevated plane, he was a great fat man whose belt, declared his awestruck servants, would have gone round three ordinary men. . . . Unlikelihood in Saints can obviously manifest itself in a variety of ways.

Neither of these Saints is treated in this book, because under war conditions the best material about them is inaccessible; I have had to limit my choice to Saints about whom there is fairly full material available in English.<sup>1</sup> But St. Francis Borgia and St. Hyacintha Mariscotti are a good introduction to the general class of Unlikely Saints, for they give us the clue to the class as a whole—Unlikely Saints generally stand in some sort of relation to a wrong committed by other people. The wrong may be of various kinds, ranging from an error of judgement sanctioned by ill-instructed public opinion (as with St. Hyacintha) to disorders in high places affecting whole nations and continents. When all allowance is made for inventive spite, the Renaissance Papacy urgently demands some sort of moral counterpoise. And it is fitting that this counterpoise should be provided by one whose name symbolizes, for all but a few experts and students, everything brought before our imagination by the words "Renaissance Popes." When fact has been disentangled from fiction, history from slander, there remains enough, of worldliness and sensuality, to call for redress. And only penance can redress such a balance. A great public wrong lies in the background of several Unlikely Saints; their function is to restore a lost moral equilibrium for the sake of the whole community. Where sin has abounded, it is only fitting that grace should yet more abound.

<sup>1</sup> This was written before I had discovered Margaret Yeo's admirable study, *The Greatest of the Borgias*. M. T. M.

## PREFACE

Where the wrong is of less sensational order, as with St. Hyacintha, the meaning of the life is something more like encouragement. Not, of course, encouragement in wrongdoing, or even in wrong-headedness. But there is a large class of distresses, some of them most poignant, which arise more from blindness than from badness. People are often so blinkered by the conventions of their times that they cannot even see that anything is the matter with their conventions. And from distresses of this class women are worse sufferers than men.

Anyone who knows anything of non-Christian societies, whether in the ancient world or in contemporary Asiatic cultures, knows too that a society which practises monogamy creates thereby a problem as to the disposal of its daughters. No Christian society can carry on, as heathen and Mohammedan societies do, on the assumption that only two outlets are open to women, marriage or prostitution. Christian society must have at least a third alternative, and preferably a fourth as well; it must provide for those girls who, for one reason or another, cannot marry. But in certain states of society, where there is no niche for the unmarried woman living in the world, the solution has been to dump all such girls in convents, regardless of whether they have a religious vocation or no.

It is not an ideal solution, either for the convent or for the girl; but before we condemn it we must take into consideration the alternatives actually practicable at a given moment in social history. The parents of St. Hyacintha would have considered it utterly wicked to leave their daughter without some kind of provision and establishment. The probable reason for their action is that they could not afford her a dowry sufficient to marry in her own class. The alternative to placing her in a convent was to let her slop about at home, without a niche, without objects or interests of any kind, and with a very considerable likelihood of going seriously wrong. To us, no doubt, it is obvious that the social conditions were in many ways faulty—but we are not so open-eyed to faulty conditions in our own

environment as to earn the right to throw stones at similar blindness in other periods.

From such faulty conditions women are the chief sufferers. What women can do, as an alternative to marriage, depends almost entirely on the state of contemporary opinion—and public opinion seldom takes a really generous view of their needs. The result of this ungenerous outlook is apt to be a crop both of forced marriages and forced vocations—there have been considerable periods when all but a minority of girls had to adapt themselves to a very restricted range of choice. But what kept the pond from freezing over—what prevented a return to the pagan view that a daughter is entirely at her father's disposal—was the minority of girls who had to fight hard to avoid marriage in order to enter a convent. The spearhead of the battle for free choice for women has been this ever-renewed skirmish about religious vocations, especially for attractive daughters. Of course, human ingenuity in giving good things a wrong twist has found a fruitful field just here. Parents at their wits' end what to do with their girls—and as helpless as ourselves before social conditions in actual possession—have been a good deal too ready to accept the convent as a final solution for every case, judged by rule of thumb instead of on its merits. And the idea of the child dedicated to God on behalf of the family came in as a "rationalization" of something clean against right reason, let alone Divine revelation.

There are two lines on which solution can be sought. The one is to labour to break the net of circumstance. The whole financial side of marriage may be in need of overhaul, for instance, or the idea that girls should marry exclusively in their own class, or the idea that it is a "come-down" for a girl to earn her living. Women are deeply affected by wrong conventions on matters such as these, and it is in every way right to strive for a public opinion and for accepted conventions that are in line with the Christian view of human personality.

But something more is needed. For one thing, many women



## PREFACE

will have to live out their lives before public opinion is brought into line with Christianity. Moreover, such gains are apt to be short-lived, for any breakdown of public order throws women back, since it narrows the area of practicable choice. Even more important, it is not good for anyone, neither for society nor for the women themselves, if women get into the mental habit known as "fighting for one's hand." Perhaps the most serious count against modern feminism—in spite of much that is admirable—is its effect on the mentality of women. . . . If therefore we get a woman Saint, produced by the pressure of precisely these unjust entanglements, we should expect her to exemplify a second type of solution, a solution *within the net of circumstance*, rather than a breaking of the net.

And this is exactly what St. Hyacintha Mariscotti offers us. She was not only a square peg, she had been forced into a round hole by just such a muddle of social conventions as constantly distort the lives of women, by denying them the free choice which is the birthright of the human person. And God reached right through the tangle to open to her a new kind of freedom. By lifting the whole issue from the social to the supernatural plane, He opened a door of hope in the very heart of her desperation. For strugglers with frustration—and how many they are to-day!—this is a much more urgent piece of help than reform of their circumstances, reform which for many must come too late. To wrench one's bonds into instruments of freedom makes the ordinary kind of emancipation look somewhat second-best.

This, then, is the second message of the Unlikely Saint: when men have done their worst—or their best, the two are not always so different—God remains. The last word rests with Him. There is no human bungling which He cannot straighten out. Not that He restores the good things of which the victim has been defrauded; He uses that very deprivation to raise the curtain into a new world altogether. No matter how men have messed up a life, God can reach to the last knot of their silly

tangles. He can give good, nay, *the* Good, even by means of unjustifiable frustration. Those who have been made eunuchs by men have it in their power to become eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The third message is this. In a number of Unlikely Saints, it is as if God Himself had put a finger on some factor, not yet recognized as evil, but which is bound to result from the ideals of an age, when those ideals deflect from reason and revelation. Such new ideals have a curious power of mystical intoxication which prevents any real critical evaluation. When that happens, God may set before men a sample of what they are heading towards, to give them a chance to reconsider and change their minds in time. And in doing so, He marks also His love for the victims of their erroneous ideal.

In general, Unlikely Saints are God's criticisms upon the doings of men, not so much what they regard as wrong but what they are embracing, mistakenly, as right. This brings us to the difference between Medieval and Modern Saints. The Medieval Saint was the growing point of a society which, however blunderingly, was trying to serve God, and which acknowledged His Will as its standard in all departments of conduct. The Modern Saint is the brake on men's increasing rejection of God; as region after region is filched from Him, a Saint stands in the way trying to turn men back.

The outstanding character of the modern era is the way it has taken back, bit by bit, what the Middle Ages had surrendered to God. Politics went first—it had always been the incompletest surrender. Men only too readily followed Machiavelli in his claim that politics is a law unto itself, amenable to no higher law. This, applied in both national and international spheres, has given us the chaos of modern Europe, as well as what is chaotic in the influence of the white man overseas. Economics soon followed politics. Banking, trade and manufacture threw off allegiance to any principle higher than the profits of those engaged in these gainful pursuits. Knowledge went next, degenerating into irresponsible opinion as it substituted subjec-

tive for objective criteria of truth.<sup>1</sup> Last of all, marriage and the home have been taken from God and subjected to purely human wisdom. Undeterred by the appalling results of this policy in other fields, it is now proposed to make man the arbiter of the transmission of life itself.

Naturally, one main function of modern Saints has been to slow down this insane process. Where the medieval Saint could be the driving force of a true progress, the modern Saint has been the brake on all that men madly mistake for progress. And being in opposition he has seldom been popular. One major task of modern Saints has been to win for the world space for repentance. This is one meaning of the large-scale philanthropy inaugurated by seventeenth-century Saints and developed down to our own times, also by Saints. They have made it their task to care for the human refuse of our God-denying civilization. Odd as it must sound, its huge philanthropy is a very, very bad mark for the modern world; no culture ought to need ambulance services on such a scale. The Saints to whom we owe it have kept the modern world from going to pieces as quickly as it would otherwise have done. Where its own untrammelled principles would have led swiftly to wreck, the Saints have won us time to think.

Not that we have used the respite. For there is one thing the modern world needs even more than time to repent, and that is the realization that repentance is needed at all. The tendency all along has been to take pride in the insane process. Hence the chief task of modern Saints has been to sound the call to repentance. And when that call falls on deaf ears, they go a step further: they repent for the unrepentant. The Saints whom God

<sup>1</sup> Physical science is a partial exception to this criticism—but it is an exception precisely because scientists, more than any other body of intellectual workers, have retained large chunks of the medieval objectivity. In so far as a man is a good scientist, it is because he is an unconscious disciple of the Schoolmen, accepting, for instance, their conception of evidence and proof. But in so far as he is a bad philosopher, he is an equally unconscious disciple of Descartes, whose triple fallacy has worked itself into the very warp and woof of modern thinking.

has sent to the modern world have been penitential Saints in quite unusual proportion. The typically *modern* Saint is the Innocent Penitent. Our idealization of "living softly every day," like Dives in the parable, has drawn from the Saints a great demonstration against softness; they have made themselves Lazarus to open our eyes.

Of course they have other characteristics as well. Against the modern self-complacency they have reiterated and underlined and trumpeted abroad a recall to the child-spirit. "Except ye become as little children" is also a keynote of modern sainthood. But the dominant note is the grimmer one, and it grows daily more urgent: "Except ye do penance, ye shall all likewise perish." And the reason is stamped over the face of the earth to-day: Never before have men so consciously and deliberately refused to be ruled by God. The pre-Christian pagan resisted something new and terrifyingly unknown. But post-Christian paganism, which begins roughly with Machiavelli, is a turning away of men from the God they had known, because His Reign had proved irksome to their love of money and ease, and their itch for power. And in every generation since, God has been ousted from some further domain. . . . But where the modern world has shouted, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," the modern Saints have taken His Cross upon their shoulders.

MARGARET T. MONRO.

## NOTE ON SOURCES

RESEARCH, difficult enough for a writer without equipment for learned inquiry, has been made even more difficult by war conditions. The best books about, for instance, St. Rose of Lima and St. Benedict Joseph Labre are in French and for the moment inaccessible. There has been nothing for it but to utilize the labours of others and to make due acknowledgement for what cannot but be unoriginal work.

In dealing with the lives of modern Saints one is on much easier ground than with Saints of earlier ages. One of the first results of the historical method, which began in the sixteenth century, was a new strictness in the procedure for canonization. This led to a new type of Saint's life, based directly on the process of Beatification or Canonization, or else written to prepare for it and on the same general plan.

That general plan, in capable hands, is an excellent instrument of investigation and not yet out of date—witness the *Life of Gemma Galgani*, by Father Germanus of St. Stanislaus, written in our own century, a source book of the finest quality, giving not only facts and documentation but an immense work of patient dissection, scientific, historical and theological. But the very qualities that make for good investigation make for poor narrative. Besides, in less competent hands—and it must be confessed that many hagiographers are hacks—this first historical method tends to make all Saints look exactly alike; the person disappears behind a fog of anecdote and disquisition. Monotony being thus ingeniously imposed upon the most differentiated of mortals, the Saints become, if not always unreal, at least infinitely remote from everyday life. And it is easy to tire of reading the same story over and over again, with little difference but the names, places and periods.

The very obviousness of these faults may however blind us to the solid merits of these "old-fashioned" lives—their patient

accuracy, their fullness, and above all, their faithfulness to the supernatural quality of their subject. This supernatural quality is not as a rule lost, but less shiningly evident in the more modern type of life which arose in response to the modern interest in growth and character-development. The first step towards "modernizing" the Saints is to straighten out their dates. Once this is done the life is usually found to have a pattern of its own, springing naturally from the blend of character and event, and so having the organic quality which our minds have come to demand. The chief merit of this type of life is that the supernatural is shown in its right relation to the natural; the danger, if any, is that the supernatural may almost become overshadowed by the natural qualities of the Saint.

This style of life, like the older one, varies enormously with the competence of writers. In the hands of genius it gives us Chesterton's *Saint Francis of Assisi*, with Father Martindale's *Vocation of Aloysius Gonzaga* as a close runner-up. Beyond that, there is a fairly wide range of workmanlike "lives" available in English.

Yet these, in their turn, are beginning to "date." For the historical method is moving on again, as once from fact to character-growth, so now from character-growth to what may perhaps be called functionalism—the relations not only within the organism of the individual life, but outwards with the whole course of history. The best lives in both the older manners are instinctively functional—Cepari's *Life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga*, for instance, published in 1606, as well as Father Martindale's modern study already mentioned. But the reawakening of the social conscience in our own lifetime is deeply affecting our conception of history. Where our parents revolted at the flattening treatment which made of Saints so many conventional window-designs, we in our turn are revolting at the portrait, in words, paint or marble, detached from the social nexus of which we are increasingly aware. This new genre is only now struggling into existence and cannot therefore be assessed. But its greatest peril is undoubtedly that the supernatural may be thrust into the

background, the whole interest centring not only on the natural character but on the stream of ordinary secular history.

For this reason the writer struggling with the functional "life" finds his best help in the older of the two styles available to him. The solid supernaturalism of the old-fashioned lives is of more value to him than the carefully dated "character-study" life. Indeed, the dates are the chief debt he owes to the latter. For simply because they represent a point of view, they are confusing as he tries to see from another, not yet quite definite, point of view. Other people's spectacles are no help to focus.

Except for St. Thérèse of Lisieux—who is here really as a sort of appendix, not part of the book—the following studies of Saints are based each on two books, one in the older and one in the later manner. From the later book I have taken, as a rule, very little but, the scheme of dating: the exception is *The Vocation of Aloysius Gonzaga*—my debt to Father Martindale is very much more than a matter of dates. In the main, these studies are based on lives in the earlier manner, even though one of them (that of St. Gemma) was written in the twentieth century.

These, then, are the works consulted—in each case the older book is placed first:

#### ST. ALOYSIUS

*The Life of Aloysius Gonzaga*, by Father Virgilio Cepari, S.J., and a masterpiece in its own kind. It was first published in Italian in 1606. An English translation appeared in 1637, but it was not really made available for English readers until 1891. For the Saint's tercentenary in that year a new translation was published, edited by Father Francis Goldie, S.J., and containing material which had come to hand since 1606.

*The Vocation of Aloysius Gonzaga*, by Father Martindale, S.J. (Sheed and Ward.) All quotations in the present study are taken from this valuable work, including the letters of the Saint.

#### ST. ROSE OF LIMA

*St. Rose of Lima*, translated from the third edition of a French

life, by Father Jean Baptiste Feuillet, O.P., Missionary Apostolic in the Antilles, published in Paris in 1671. The English translation is one of a series brought out by the Fathers of the Oratory, in London and Birmingham, about a hundred years ago, and was published by Thomas Richardson & Son, London, Dublin and Derby, in 1847.

*St. Rose of Lima: The Flower of the New World*, by F. M. Capes. (R. T. Washbourne Ltd., London: 2nd edition, 1913.)

#### ST. BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE

*Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Benedict Joseph Labre*, from the Italian of Don Antonio Maria Coltrare, published in Rome in 1807. The English translation is in the same series as the "Oratorian" life of St. Rose of Lima, and was published in 1850.

*Saint Benedict Joseph Labre*, by C. L. White. (Burns & Oates, no date.)

#### SAINT GEMMA GALGANI

*The Life of Gemma Galgani*, by Father Germanus of St. Stanislaus, Passionist. Translated from the Italian by the Rev. A. M. O'Sullivan, O.S.B. (Sands & Co., 1913.)

*Gemma of Lucca*, by Benedict L. Williamson. (Alexander-Ousely Ltd., Westminster, 1932.)

#### SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX

The only work consulted is *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, edited by T. N. Taylor. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne.) This contains the *Spiritual Autobiography*, the Saint's letters, a collection of her sayings, and other editorial material.

M. T. M.



A PIECE OF TWISTED IRON  
*or*  
MACHIAVELLI'S PRINCE GOES GOOD  
THE STORY OF ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA, 1568-91

I. *The Twist in the Iron*

HAGIOGRAPHY has much to answer for. It has to answer, among other things, for William James's scornful dismissal of St. Louis of Gonzaga for owning "an intellect . . . no larger than a pin's head."<sup>1</sup> From which it may be deduced that James was so disgusted by a nineteenth-century "Life" that he omitted the normal duty of a scholar: he failed to look up his sources. Had he done so, he would have been obliged to account for the confident expectation, felt by all who knew him, that Aloysius Gonzaga<sup>2</sup> would end up as General of the Society of Jesus, a position not usually regarded as open to the pin-headed. He would also have had to explain why, wherever Aloysius passed, the love of God and of man broke into flower behind him.

James is clearly wrong and would even deserve to be called wrong-headed—he was certainly careless—but for the fact that Aloysius has suffered more from his biographers than almost any other Saint. Yet the earliest *Life*<sup>3</sup> is a masterpiece of its kind. Father Virgilio Cepari, S.J., who had been a novice with Aloysius, took unstinting pains to produce a meticulously

<sup>1</sup> *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> The name should be Ludovicus, which commonly gives Lewis, Louis and Luigi in English, French and Italian respectively. In Italy the Saint is generally known as San Luigi, in France as St. Louis de Gonzagues. But he signed his letters with a local variant of his name, Aluigi, and this was latinized as Aloysius. For some reason, this latinized form is the one that has caught on in England.

<sup>3</sup> See Note on Sources.

accurate account, visiting every place in Italy where Aloysius had spent any length of time, and obtaining innumerable sworn statements from witnesses to the events to which they deposed. All this was so thoroughly done that the process of beatification itself brought to light little fresh material and confirmed practically all Cepari's researches.

Cepari, however, worked under one peculiar handicap: many of the princes and nobles who enter into the story were still alive, or if not, their children were alive and most jealous of their family honour. Yet few of them were like Bayard, *sans reproche*. Every word about these princely houses had to be weighed and scrutinized and rechecked for fear of giving offence. Not for Cepari to say that the brother in whose favour Aloysius abdicated was a worthless young hound; everyone in Italy knew it, for the land had rung with his scandals. Neither could Cepari say outright that the court of Francesco de' Medici was a sink of iniquity where something like a deliberate attempt to corrupt Aloysius had been made. Everyone knew that too, at least in the seventeenth century.

But by the nineteenth it had been forgotten. Hence Cepari's narrative no longer produced the same effect—readers could no longer supply from memory the vivid background of court scandal. And without that background Aloysius looked a singularly pointless young prig. All the colour and violence, all the heroism and anguish, all the clash of stubborn wills at strife—this had vanished from the narrative, leaving a washed-out namby-pamby, call him escapist or exhibitionist at your choice. It became impossible to make anything of him, even as a pathological specimen, which ought to have warned a psychologist as penetrating as James that something had gone wrong with the evidence. Perhaps, however, a New England upbringing was not the best preparation for balanced judgement on a Renaissance prince.

"I've read [a certain ladies' paper]?" asks Kipling's American taken prisoner in the Boer War. "It's refined, sir—and innocuous, and full of nickel-plated sentiments guaranteed

to improve the mind.”<sup>1</sup> That was exactly James’s handicap; there was nothing innocuous or nickel-plated about either the Gonzagas or their world, nor were subscribers to “uplift” papers a safe guide to the sort of women whom Aloysius shut out behind his lowered lids. Smiles’s *Self-help*—and James has not shaken off Smiles’s ideals—contains no recipe for a fight like his, with his back to the wall in a world whose colour and romance had all been betrayed to the devil.

Nor was the foe merely all round outside; he attacked from within in the form of a heredity that can only be called demonic. Aloysius the angel could so easily have been Aloysius the fiend—in few natures do we see so clearly how all that parts Michael from Satan is a hair, the hair that turns the scales between obedience and revolt, God and self. “I am a piece of twisted iron” was Aloysius’s self-estimate; “I entered religion in order to get twisted straight.” And if to us the iron is more obvious than the twist, that only makes the testimony more valuable. For it tells us something about the untwisting that might be overlooked: its cost.

## 2. *The Ore*

For three hundred years the Gonzaga clan had been fighting its way to the front in the tangled politics of northern Italy. Its reward was a bewildering medley of fiefs, of which the chief was the Duchy of Mantua; and in the holding of these it showed a certain solidarity. Not that feuds within the family were unknown—the family temper saw to that, a temper that could nurse a grudge in silent sulks for months, then explode into violent speech and action. *La Gonzaghina*, as this amiable habit was called, had added sundry tumultuous chapters to Italian history.

But on the 9th of March, 1568, when all the cannon fired to welcome the heir of Ferrante Gonzaga, Prince Marquis of

<sup>1</sup> From the story called “The Captive,” in *Traffics and Discoveries*, p. 22.

Castiglione, the family was comparatively at peace with itself and thereby the more formidable to the world outside. Indeed, the new baby, christened Aloysius after a rumbustious grandfather, promised to draw the union even closer. For as time passed it became clear that he would inherit from two of his uncles as well as from his father. Orazio Gonzaga of Solferino had no children, while Alfonso of Castel Goffredo had only daughters. The heir of Ferrante of Castiglione was thus a more important person than a mere marquis and Prince of the Holy Roman Empire. He would gather into his hands the triple fief of that formidable grandfather who had inscribed above his tomb: "Here Aloysius Gonzaga, Marquis, willed to rest, who never rested while alive."<sup>1</sup>

Our Aloysius was not a very restful character either. At the age of six, he woke a camp during the siesta by firing off a cannon all by himself, having first stolen the necessary gunpowder from a sleeping soldier. The recoil knocked him down—which would not have saved him from his father's wrath. For Ferrante, waking up in a fine rage and fearing mutiny, was minded to take a strictly military view of the breach of discipline. (Aloysius was already in training to be a great general.) But the whole camp begged him off. He was something of a mascot with the men, of whom in fact he saw fully enough. For when he was sent home—camp life, alas, proved too hard on a six-year tummy, and besides, he got malaria—he startled the ladies of Castiglione by his command of the less professional part of a soldier's vocabulary. The ladies exclaimed. His tutor, an admirable person named Del Turco, told him that men of his rank did not talk like that. Aloysius acquiesced—he had a terrific sense of his position—and the teacup settled to peace again.

With these ladies we encounter the central combat of Aloysius's early life. Not that they could do much to him at six,

<sup>1</sup> *The Vocation of Aloysius Gonzaga*, by Fr. C. C. Martindale, S.J., p. 16. Save for a few well-known quotations, all sentences in inverted commas in this chapter are from this valuable book.

save flatter and fawn, and at Castiglione they were restrained by the presence of his mother, Donna Marta, presiding over the purest court in Italy. The real danger was of increasing that sense of dignity which was already too strong, so strong that he ceased swearing at the mere hint of unbecomingness. But Italian children ripen early, and Aloysius was precocious even for an Italian. At an incredibly early age, well before he was ten, the ladies' advances held another note. He was, of course, a tremendous matrimonial catch. That, however, was the least of it. When out of his mother's sight, Aloysius soon had to know that almost every woman he met would have been flattered by a liaison, and many had little coyness in showing their hand. The elegant love-making of France had been transformed by Italian realism into something far more positive, and before that positive thing he had to take a positive line of some kind. His reaction was as swift as it was uncompromising—a violent rejection.

This violence is evidence of real temptedness—nothing is falser than the picture of Aloysius as a lily-child. . . . When Douglas bore the Heart of Bruce to Spain, a Spanish knight expressed surprise that the foremost champion of the age should have an unscarred face. But "I have hands," was the dry Douglas response. If Aloysius carried his soul unscarred through a fiercer War of Independence it was for a similar cause.

Yet the swift and unerring choice needs explaining too. Much as Aloysius had against him, it is only fair to take note of the few things on his side. His temperament—he had the North Italian combination of steely brain and passionate nature, and the steely brain woke first—made him incapable of any mere soaking in languor. He was a born master of men. And while his career might have been punctuated by a series of explosive affairs he would never, I think, have allowed any woman to come between him and his career. Dominance was in him a far profounder passion. There was something in Aloysius which would always have regarded the feminine lure as a distraction from the masculine business of mastering his world.

His childhood environment was by no means wholly evil. It held, for instance, his tutor, Del Turco, one of the few people whom Aloysius wholly trusted, and with reason. Del Turco gave his pupil much more than a sense of what was due to his position. He trained that hard sense of fact, and with it the power of concise statement and of keeping to the point, which is a constant character of Aloysius's mind. And beyond him was the parish priest of Castiglione, the Archpriest as the records style him, a man of no great gifts, just one of those sweet, wholesome characters which Christianity can bring to flower in unexpected corners. To this dear, good man, lovably ordinary in his patient fidelity, Aloysius owed his first ideas on his Christian profession as he passed out from the care of his mother.

That mother was the biggest influence in his life. To her Aloysius owed the fact that his father, Ferrante, remained one of the most likeable, though not one of the most gifted, of the Gonzagas. Violent and tempestuous like them all, he was neither treacherous nor cruel, and in his own peculiar way he respected the Will of God. Ferrante's worst vice was gambling—whereby he gave Aloysius considerable practice in the arts of the financier and diplomatist; by the time he was fifteen the boy was negotiating, not unsuccessfully, with the Jews.

Only with his mother he was never a diplomat. With many, perhaps with most others, we find him for years on the defensive, manœuvring for position, barricading himself behind an impenetrable reserve, withdrawing into a secret world. From Donna Marta alone he never hid—no, not when he refused to be alone in the room with her. She was the only person who had the key to his inner world, who could walk in and out of it at will, since she shared his ideals and had much of his heroic temper. To her he always showed his real self, dropping the bars of reserve to which he treated the rest of the world. She was the only person to whom he spoke quite freely, all the more freely as there was so little need for speech. There were never very many words between this mother and son.

It was from his mother that Aloysius inherited his power to take an unfashionable line of his own, drifting neither on the tide of temperament nor on the current of convention. To be even a faithful wife and good mother in such an environment implied a rare firmness of choice. But what his mother did quietly, unostentatiously keeping the Commandments in a society that flouted them, Aloysius, true Gonzaga, had to do tempestuously. As Ferrante's son and Aloysius Alexander's grandson he was bound to raise some sort of ripple in the waters of time. When, however, we ask how he came to raise a tidal wave, we have to look beyond Time to Eternity.

### 3. *Iron in the Fire*

For the factors enumerated do not account for the actual story. What they could account for would be a quite different story, the story of the Ideal Despot, giving his triple fiefs a generation of good government and light taxes—if indeed he was allowed to live so long. For the attempt to be an honest diplomat might have ended in early assassination. Not that this by itself excuses Aloysius from taking this road; for the moral issue of his life is that he refused it. We shall have to take this up later when we see his choice more as he saw it himself. For the moment we have come to this: As far as temperament and environment take us, Aloysius could have been mourned for a season as the Ideal Despot, then forgotten by all but the antiquaries. Had he elected to be “good” in this straightforward way, he would have lost his place in history and been relegated to the historians. That he achieved the true reward of history, a place in popular memory, is due to factors of another order.

It began with his mother. She taught him to say his prayers. But it did not end with her. When Aloysius was seven he took a sudden turn, which later he called his “conversion,” by which he meant the acquirement of a sense of personal responsibility. Aloysius became a *self*. He developed a new power of judge-

ment and a new scale of values. And all this he connected quite definitely with his prayers. The outward manifestation was the refusal of a cushion to kneel on, an eager delight in the prayers and psalms his mother had taught him, a new love for the Little Office of Our Lady, and a trick of pestering his mother or the maids for help when his own powers of reading gave out. But the inward manifestation was yet more striking—a steady, determined effort to control his temper.

And this brought with it a new temptation. Every account of Aloysius dwells on his powers of fascination. He cast a spell on all he met. This charm would have been part of his fate whatever happened; it would have shed a glow over his wilfulness had he chosen to give it rein. But controlled wilfulness increased his fascination. It brought him a new degree of adulation, of which he already had far more than was good for him, more than would have been good for a less dominating character. All his servants adored him, in part by contrast with other sprigs of nobility—his brother Rodolfo pointed the contrast. Nor was it only servants. His social equals found him too intriguing for words, and said so without reserve. The effect on his character could easily have been worse than indulgence in temper. He might have jumped out of the frying-pan of uncontrolled temper into the icy fire of spiritual pride. That he did not do so is the chief miracle of grace in his life.

When Aloysius was nine, his father came home after a two years' absence at the court of Spain, to be filled with delight at the poise and restraint of his eldest son. It had cost Ferrante something to relinquish his hope of making Aloysius a great general. Disappointment was now swallowed up in a new scheme—Aloysius was clearly cut out for a diplomat, a sphere in which he might achieve greater glory than in war. From this time on, the career mapped out for Aloysius, not only by his father but by all the Gonzaga ambitions, was to become the first diplomat in Europe, a kind of incarnation of Machiavelli's Prince.

But another ideal was already drifting through the little boy's mind; vaguely, formlessly, he was thinking he might be a monk.



The dream was definite enough to make him turn and survey his younger brothers—into what sort of hands should he surrender his inheritance if he decided not to keep it? For that inheritance contained responsibilities as well as opportunities, and Aloysius had by now a strong sense of duty in his conception of his position. There was a considerable family by this time—in the end, eight children in all, though only two concern us here. Rodolfo, the next in age, might have stood as model for all that was worst in a Renaissance princeling, without even intelligence as an offset to his vices. Francesco, the third brother, was of better stuff, and as matter of fact lived to see Aloysius raised to the altars of the Church. Aloysius appears to have realized that Rodolfo would not long hold anything that was passed to him; he was predestined to the assassin's bullet; real hope for the family lay with Francesco. But though Aloysius saw through Rodolfo with the pitiless clarity of youth, he somehow managed to love him, too: he came to be the only person who could manage Rodolfo, who on his side was astonishingly free from jealousy of his brilliant brother.

Aloysius said nothing of all this to his father—he seems to have been always a little in awe of Ferrante. But he let out something of what was passing in his mind to his mother. Donna Marta hoped that one of her boys would be a religious, and said so. "I think God will do you that favour," Aloysius observed, and added, "I think I shall be the one." She at once snubbed him, telling him that his being the eldest decided his duty, and forbidding him to speak of it again. And he obeyed her. For a time, at least, he appears to have wholeheartedly accepted his father's plans for him. But his mother remembered the incident, put it into her prayers and pondered it before God.

Meantime, however, Ferrante was in charge. From the age of nine to the age of twelve Aloysius was sent away with his brother Rodolfo in the care of their tutor, Del Turco, to train for this diplomatic career. Before going to the head of the family, the Duke of Mantua, the boys spent two years at the Medici court of Florence. They had their own establishment where they lived

and did lessons—at which Aloysius really worked, for he enjoyed using his keen young brain. All his life he hated idleness; he had that instinct for hard work which goes with genius in the practical order. Latin and Italian were his chief studies at this time; indeed, one reason for the sojourn at Florence was to perfect him in Tuscan instead of his native dialect.

But though lessons held the primary place, there was much of court life and attendance at court functions. The round was endless and inexorable, a magnificent succession of weddings, funerals and embassies, with horse-racing and pigeon-shooting by way of relaxation. Also, of course, scandals. Rodolfo accepted it all at its face value. Aloysius, with a far more critical mind, was affected in a way no one had foreseen: he was filled with a growing sense of the worthlessness of the life to which he was destined.

There was, however, a more immediate problem, one wrapped up in his all-encompassing circumstances. Rodolfo might succumb to Medici morals without a struggle. Not so Aloysius. Even if Del Turco's vigilance shielded the boys from evil in act, it was all about them, taken for granted, flaunted, inescapable. And the brunt of it came upon Aloysius. He was far more sought after than Rodolfo, who lacked alike his heirship and his charm. To hold his own, it was not enough to take refuge behind Del Turco. He must make some kind of personal stand.

All through this period, then, we must think of Aloysius with his back to the wall, fighting desperately, without advice, without experience, making mistakes, falling into foolish excesses—foolish at least to those who have never encountered his combination of enemies—but never giving in, always keeping his head just above water, always, that is, succeeding in the one thing that mattered at the price of laying himself open to criticism over things that mattered less. Even Del Turco, to whom he clung as the one decent, dependable person about him, supplied some of the criticism. At a party of youthful magnificos Aloysius incurred a forfeit, to kiss a girl's shadow on the wall, where-

upon he turned and marched out of the room. Del Turco lectured him—and perhaps he deserved it—on his bad manners and lack of consideration for people's feelings. Certainly there was a good deal of his native arrogance in this act, though it was mixed up with a bewildered, boyish desperation which no one should scorn. He began to be chaffed as a woman-hater, when in fact every girl he met was apt to behave as a threat to his masculine self-respect. It was in part a hardness in the grain that made him take the stand he now did.

But hardness of grain alone could not have pulled so young a boy through so long an ordeal—at ten or eleven a year is all but infinite, and Aloysius had to stick it out for three. It was well for him that he turned away from himself altogether, seeking aid from that Church which “offers to all the means of holiness,” even to miserable little princes with a tormented heredity and an environment that blurred all distinction of loveliness and evil.

He began to go more often to Confession, feeling chiefly that his temper was apt to escape him in bitter, wounding words. One cannot read his recorded utterances without realizing that he had a quite exceptional power of expressing his mind in brief, memorable sentences that stuck—and stung. His rank gave him licence to snub what he did not like, and his snubs were sometimes devastating. It is difficult not to admire what one does well. It points to unusual self-knowledge that Aloysius should see so clearly where his weakness lay, never letting his brilliance of speech blind him to what it held of sin.

That his tongue represented a weak spot in his character was brought home to him about this time, and it wrought a crisis in his life. Having elected to make a general confession of his whole life, he shirked all mention of the foul language he had aired at Castiglione after his experiences in camp. On his way home, his conscience troubled him until he turned back and completed the story. This swearing, together with his theft of gunpowder, is the nearest thing to a grave sin in the whole career of Aloysius Gonzaga, and it took place before he was old enough to be a

at last shut the one door he could command, his eyes? But he did not merely shut the world out. He shut himself in—with God. And in that dear-won privacy he taught himself to think. In the end, it is said, he could keep his mind on any subject he chose for as long as he chose.

When he had reached this point—not of complete mental control but of withdrawal into the inner world where he met God—the conditions were made just a little harder: he and Rodolfo were sent to Mantua, but without Del Turco. As he met God within, he lost his chief prop from without. In one sense, no doubt, Mantua must have been an easier world than Florence. The Duke of Mantua, head of all the Gonzagas, was nothing like so corrupt as Francesco de' Medici, and his Duchess, Eleanor of Austria, the Emperor's aunt, was a real friend to Aloysius. But if his kinsmen in one sense made less effort to corrupt him, in another they made more—they did not hesitate to flatter him. At Mantua, Aloysius faced the ordeal of family approval and high expectation. He was by now the hope of all the Gonzaga clan; no such expectations were formed of his cousin Vincent, the heir of Mantua; the Gonzaga careerism passed Vincent over in favour of Aloysius, and such expectation might easily have turned his head. It was a far trickier situation than a straight fight for chastity. And he had to face it without the one person, save his mother, whom he fully trusted.

Help came from a strange source—at Mantua he fell ill. He suffered from strangury, painful in itself and disagreeable in the restricted diet which the doctors imposed. Pain and privation between them kept his mind alert to the real value of the prizes offered by the world. During this time at Mantua, when all his circle looked to him to crown the family glory by a splendid career, the world appeared more and more to Aloysius not so much wicked as utterly worthless, a madman's scramble for perishing things. It was the insanity of the whole thing which now forcibly struck him.

And at the same time, the doctors' dieting opened out a new vista—he discovered fasting. Born whole-hogger that he was,

he promptly overdid it. During this year at Mantua he permanently injured his digestion so that he was never able to eat normally again. But however much we deplore this, we must not let ourselves be blinded to the real gains. One of them did not yet mature: through his fasting Aloysius, like other Saints, made contact with poverty and so with the harsh realities of life; it is for lack of this reality that unmortified humanitarians so easily insult those whom they wish to help. The fasting of the Saints counts for much in enabling the poor to accept them, not as patronizers but as brothers.

The immediate development was on another line. Fasting brings a certain clarity of mind, and in this new clarity Aloysius now saw his course. He had, at his mother's bidding, set aside his early vague longings after the religious life and had done his best to fall in with his father's wishes. Now he realized the utter impossibility of ever successfully accommodating himself to life in the world. Not only did he hate and despise the world; to serve it he would have to stifle the most vividly real thing in himself. No longer could he hope to reconcile himself to such an impossible demand. At all costs he must get out of the trap into which he had been born. He must be a priest.

With this decision newly crystallized in his mind he was recalled to Castiglione, through the insistence of Donna Marta who had not seen her eldest sons for three years. So for twelve months Aloysius lived in the family circle, sometimes at Castiglione, sometimes at the newly acquired fief of Monferrato, as yet barely reconciled to Gonzaga rule. On one journey to Monferrato he narrowly escaped drowning, for his carriage broke in two at a dangerous ford. His studies, which he loved, were almost as much interrupted as at court. Such was the unrestful background of his momentous thirteenth year.

For it was in this year that Aloysius definitely crossed some kind of spiritual Rubicon, after which there could be no return. All the forces at work in his soul continued to burgeon and grow. He still lived withdrawn, taking as little part as possible in outward shows, and that under obvious duress. But this

negative outward bearing covered a prodigious development within.

Once again a book came into his hands, a synopsis of Christian doctrine by St. Peter Canisius, a dry little book with a dry summary of instructions on how to meditate. This balanced, stiff, didactic little work was exactly, said Aloysius, "suited to his character." He always wanted a reasoned foundation for what he did. He laid hold now of this doctrinal soil for the life burgeoning within, nourished his soul on it and thrived.

But any possible introversion—not that he was ever in great danger from that side—was still further checked by another book that came his way, *Lettere delle Indie*, narratives of the early Jesuit missionaries in the East. This gave his mind exactly the turn it needed, for it suggested a field of action, and Aloysius, with his magnetic power over men, was bound to be a man of action—some day. His masterfulness was best controlled by being turned, after purification, into a wholesome channel. Of course he did not argue this out for himself; he merely responded by instinct to the right call. And he did not wait to grow up—he went off and began to teach catechism to the guttersnipes of Castiglione. Surely St. Francis Xavier smiled from Heaven upon his youngest disciple! And there is no reason why we too should not smile.

I cannot find any definite evidence that this contact with poor people was connected, in the minds of contemporaries, with the decisive step of this memorable year: his penances. But there are signs that he was moved by something more than revulsion from the meaningless futilities of court life. From some quarter or another a new realization came to him—of the cost at which these magnificences were maintained. The whole burden fell upon the shoulders of the poor. His kinsman, St. Charles Borromeo, had been converted by just this discovery. And as it happens, St. Charles Borromeo visited Castiglione that year. Impressed with Aloysius, he gave him his First Communion—one of the great dates of his life. We know that the holy Archbishop of Milan had long conferences with the lonely little heir

of Castiglione. We know that Aloysius himself was penetrating into the homes of the poor. Have these facts no bearing on what followed?

In Bernard Shaw's earlier plays we sometimes get a situation with a certain kinship to that in which Aloysius found himself: a young innocent, of high but untried ideals, learns that his (or her) wealth comes from a tainted source. A heroic solution is forbidden to Shaw, not so much by his irony as by the individualistic morality which is all that his characters know. Even total rejection of the tainted money is handled by him so as to stress its cruel side: the breach in a personal relationship by no means devoid of fineness. The victim's choice is between profiting by sin and violating the sanctities of affection.

That Aloysius found a solution more heroic than the Shavian yet more humbly tender is due to one thing alone: he was not an individualist. He was a Catholic with a thousand years of the Catholic corporateness in his blood. Hence his instinct followed a line mysterious, even repulsive, to individualists, since they lack the spiritual solidarity which alone gives meaning to his act. With Aloysius, repudiation of sin did not mean withdrawing the hem of his robe from the sinner; it meant identification. He, Aloysius, was part and parcel of the guilty world whose offensiveness to God he now so clearly saw. That gave him no right to condemn. What it gave him was not a right but a duty, the duty to suffer, to expiate, to make his own the sins of his kinsfolk and compeers. . . . Not that he argued this all out. He was acting on instinct, the deep corporate instinct of the Body of Christ, when he reached out his hand for the first leather he could find, which happened to be his dogs' leashes, and made himself a scourge.

#### 4. *On the Anvil*

This crucial thirteenth year, full both of harvests and of new sowings, saw the beginning of something that was to fill the next four years of his life: his duel with his father. They were not too unevenly matched. Aloysius had the stronger character and

the more practised habit of self-control. Ferrante had all the advantages of maturity, experience and parental rights. And when these failed to overcome the boy's resistance he did not scruple to fall back on his temper. Ferrante was, I think, the one person before whom Aloysius quailed.

For, as always, his fight was on two fronts. Aloysius had a solid filial regard for his father, appreciation of his many kindnesses, real respect and affection. He never, for instance, turned on his father the chilly power of summing up which he might use towards his brothers. His one estimate of Ferrante which has come down to us is a surprising one—that he wished to do the Will of God. Aloysius could not, and did not, discount his father's wishes when trying to ascertain God's will for himself. The misery of the conflict sprang from the strength of the bond between father and son.

If Aloysius had met temper with temper, *Gonzaghina* with *Gonzaghina*, I do not think Ferrante would have much minded. What first disconcerted and then enraged him was this silent persistence in a course which seemed to him unworthy of his son's intelligence. Here was Aloysius, with the world at his feet, and he could hardly be persuaded to touch the ball with a contemptuous toe. It is not that Ferrante wanted Aloysius to be simply ordinary; his disappointment sprang from his perception that Aloysius was in every sense extraordinary, with an endowment of character and intelligence such as a family tree produces perhaps once in its history. It was cruel, unbearable, incomprehensible that, with a brilliant future within his grasp, the boy refused to throw himself into the plans to prepare him for it.

If Aloysius had been a few years older, he could fairly be blamed for a certain want of tact and discrimination, for holding out about secondary issues as resolutely as about primary ones, for not giving in where nothing would be compromised but his convenience. But for all his precocity and his knowledge, in one sense, of the world, he was yet a very young boy with a boy's narrowness of outlook. Given support and guidance, he might have "let up on" some of his precautions without losing the



main fight. Battling alone, he felt he had to keep every gap closed if he was to hold his ground at all. And, indeed, without allies, he may have been right.

Had Aloysius relied simply on himself at this time, he would certainly have made shipwreck, not perhaps in the sense of surrendering his vocation, but in the sense of inflicting on himself such spiritual injury as would have made him useless for God's purposes, in either world or Church. As it was, he damaged his health in a way no novice-master would have allowed. That he escaped a much graver peril, the hardening of his whole character in self-sufficiency and pride, is due entirely to his prayer. Throughout this wretched period, when for years he hardly knew an untroubled hour, Aloysius reached out in spirit to God. And his cry was ever, "Direct me."

Unless, however, we sympathize with Ferrante we do not truly sympathize with Aloysius, for it was what was good on the father's side that made the son's anguish. Ferrante knew very well that in Aloysius God had given him a unique and irreplaceable gift, that this son of his could be the greatest Gonzaga of them all. And as a matter of fact, this ambition was realized, though not as Ferrante expected. Aloysius is the one Gonzaga who has escaped from the historians into the living stream of history. Ferrante was, in fact, making the all-too-human mistake, however pardonable to his love and pride, of trying to serve God in his own way instead of in God's. Through all that followed Ferrante and not only Aloysius was "making his soul." It was a less exceptional soul, yet in the end the act of surrender to which it attained was something very exceptional indeed. In the meantime, however, Ferrante found Aloysius aggravating beyond all bearing, and said so without mincing words.

He would not go into public unless practically forced. If forced, he kept his eyes down and made no attempt to take part in what was going on. At Monferrato this was especially annoying, as Ferrante wanted to conciliate his new subjects and looked to Aloysius to exercise his charm for the family good. Nothing doing. At Castiglione, Aloysius recognized a duty to be

debonair—as he went about there, they say, his hat was never out of his hands, so busy was he kept acknowledging salutes. But any attempt to parade him elsewhere was frustrated by his resolute persistence in recollection. Plays he refused to attend at all. This was maddening, for drama was a Gonzaga speciality; they were the inventors of the repertory company and their plays were in demand as far away as Paris. As, however, the Parliament of Paris pronounced their plays “a school of debauchery for young folk of both sexes” we must not imagine Aloysius refusing to enter, say, Shakespeare’s theatre. He consented to escort his mother to the playhouse, but once she was installed he took his leave and went home; nothing could shake his resolve. That he could be so charming merely heightened the offence. He was refusing to do what he could do easily and well. Ferrante could neither understand nor accept the situation.

Donna Marta was too wise to side completely with either, even if, poor lady, she had not been genuinely torn in two. She was much nearer understanding Aloysius than his father; but her intuitive sympathy did not readily find words and had nothing to pit against the father’s reasoned case. Her own regrets for his choice were more on the score of losing him for good than of his losing his chance of fame. She wept over his bloodstained sheets and shirts, but could not nerve herself to let him go. For years, however, she acted as shock absorber, drawing the first fury of Ferrante’s rages which, as has been suggested, Aloysius really feared.

With things in this state, it is not surprising that Aloysius began to haunt the neighbouring monasteries, of Capuchins and Barnabites, for the contrast they offered to his home. It was the gaiety of the monks that drew him, and their orderly life. “Religious in very truth live according to reason,” was his reflection at this time, says Ceparì. Besides, these men of quiet face and kindly speech brought him something that he needed—reassurance that he was not chasing a will-o’-the-wisp. Poise and peace, real happiness of heart, these things actually existed. But only in the service of God, and God’s service meant leaving the

world. That was a point at which Aloysius never faltered. The programme, so obvious to us, of serving God in the world, he set aside by instinct as not for him. And who shall say he was wrong? How should one of his heredity obey God in a world whose customs were set in disobedience?

But here another problem began to loom up. Even in a monastery Aloysius realized he would not be safe from the world. It could pursue him in the shape of ecclesiastical preferment. If he announced his desire for the priesthood, he would be made a cardinal before he was old enough to be ordained—the Gonzaga ambitions would see to that. This had happened to St. Charles Borromeo and it had helped to convert him. But it happened to many whom it did not convert. There was small point in abdicating a principedom of the Empire if he was instantly to be made a Prince of the Church. Why, his father's cousin, Annibal Gonzaga, had entered the Franciscans, only to be made their General! This fact, which later did much to reconcile Ferrante to Aloysius's choice, turned Aloysius himself away from all the older Orders. Only one Order, the newest, the Society of Jesus, could protect him from unwanted wealth, for it alone demanded of its members a vow to refuse all honours in the Church. Only as a Jesuit could he be poor and obscure. . . . That he was himself the worst enemy of his own obscurity never seems to have occurred to Aloysius. But it occurred to everyone else.

As this fateful thirteenth year dragged on, Ferrante saw what he hoped would prove a diversion. The Dowager Empress Mary was to join her widowed brother, Philip II, in Spain. Ferrante decided to take his whole family to Madrid. So in 1581 they set off, Ferrante, Donna Marta, three of their sons and two of their daughters, with, of course, a swarm of attendants. How lonely Aloysius was in all this mob comes out in his touching delight at the hope that Del Turco would join them again. Apparently the hope was not fulfilled—there are no letters to Del Turco from Spain, but neither is he mentioned in any record of that sojourn—but the expectation drew from Aloysius the most charming series of his early letters. For all their formality

and brevity—did Aloysius ever use two words where one would do?—these letters to his old tutor are brimming with an eager, boyish affection we meet nowhere else. But Del Turco seems not to have come, and Aloysius continued his struggle alone.

At Madrid he was made a Knight of St. James, and also one of the special pages in attendance on Don Diego, Prince of the Asturias, which meant among other things sharing his studies under the best teachers of the age. This Aloysius definitely enjoyed, and acquitted himself so well that he was chosen to read the address of welcome when Philip visited Madrid in the March of 1583. Spanish and Latin were his chief studies for a time—Aloysius was becoming an accomplished linguist. But what most interested him, naturally in that age of exploration, were mathematics, astronomy and geography. These pushed back his intellectual horizons, as the *Lettere delle Indie* had already enlarged his spiritual horizons, giving him a big idea of the Kingdom of Christ. All this now linked up with his first studies in “philosophy” where, as might be expected, what most drew him was what we should call Natural Religion. As his mind filled more and more with the greatness of God, there was less and less room for all the littlenesses of man. He was acquiring in every direction a sense of the vast majesty of that God whom he so desired to serve.

A less orthodox chapter in his education was provided by his father's gambling debts. Ferrante was gaming heavily, and the Castiglione estates could not stand the drain. When word got about of Aloysius's desire to enter religion the Spanish court tittered—they took it as an amusingly original way of putting the screw on an erring parent. “No gaming, no vocation,” they imagined was the pistol held at Ferrante's head. So impossible is it for Prince Charming to get himself taken seriously. The actuality was very different, long letters to relatives who might be helpful, long negotiations with moneylenders. Gout kept Ferrante from managing matters himself, but he also recognized in Aloysius the better head for business. It increased his sense of

grievance—a boy who could cope with such affairs at fifteen could go any distance. But would he?

He would not. In Spain, Aloysius was observing the same demeanour as in Italy, with one significant addition: he would raise his eyes to no woman's face. Even the Empress he did not get to know by sight. And he kept it up without the slightest relaxation. Never was there the least flicker to hint at slackening purpose and give rise to hope of change. He went where he was constrained to go and kept his eyes cast down.

And all the time his power of concentration was growing, and in the heart of it his power of prayer. The need for solitude was becoming a torture. At Castiglione they had a little begun to respect his privacy; his own servants at least would sometimes guard his door. Away from home he had learned to exercise strategy. In an uncle's house he had discovered a small room, empty at most hours, where the servants washed their hair, and to this he had managed to steal unmolested if not unobserved. At Madrid, all that offered was a woodshed in the palace grounds. It is from the servants that we learn of these shifts; presumably they were conniving at his escapes.

But he was keeping his eyes very wide open for the one thing he wanted to see—a way out of the trap. In Spain, more than he had done in Italy, he began to come across the Jesuits and to realize more clearly what they had to offer: not only protection from re-engulfment in the world but scope for his particular powers. For one so masterful needed scope. Aloysius could, and must have known he could, do and say things that no one else could get away with. Nor was this a matter of inferiors blinded by adulation. He pulled off a quite extraordinary rebuke to no less a person than the Prince of the Asturias himself. One gusty day, as Don Diego kept shouting to the wind to stop blowing, Aloysius observed to him that, though he was the heir of all the Spains, only God could control the wind. There must have been some sparkle of manner, lost in print, to make the remark go down, not only with Don Diego but with the courtiers who overheard. These hastened to Philip to tell him of the

liberty taken, and so skilfully, with his heir. The skill has evaporated with the recording ink. The inflection of Aloysius's voice has to be guessed from its effect—Philip the Grim relished the joke and laughed. Somehow, Aloysius had neatly dodged between the Charybdis of priggishness, which would have given immediate offence, and the Scylla of flattery, which was all that anyone else would have even attempted.

The boy who could bring this off needed, one would say, a sphere of action, indeed of rule. The Jesuits offered him not only personal poverty but the chance to use his powers. Aloysius turned to them more and more. His confessor, Father Ferdinand Patterno, rector of the Jesuit College at Madrid, has told us how Aloysius impressed him at that time. Besides his extraordinary innocence, what surprised the Father was his maturity of judgment, his dislike of being idle, and that in talking he never said a word against anyone. Control of his tongue must have been all but completely won.

In other ways, too, Aloysius had come on. Gone was the little-boy obstinacy on all fronts, that made no distinction between principle and convenience. The Aloysius of this phase had learned to yield where only his dislikes were concerned. This speaks, not only of a more ripe judgement, but of a more matured will, since it can accept trials which once were risks. And this power of yielding made him all the more formidable when he stood out, for it lifted his decisions out of the sphere of caprice, where they could have been dismissed as mere tantrum or showing off. Yet along with this new discrimination, or maybe because of it, the Aloysius of this phase was rather a popular character. He was exceedingly good company when he chose, at times genuinely merry. Nor was this kept for select intimates. He "got on" with the most diverse characters and social classes, casting his effortless spell over superiors, inferiors and equals alike.

And when he had reached this new power of poise, once again the contest stiffened. What had been a silent duel of wills with his father flared up into open conflict.

It began in his inner life, which more and more was becoming his centre of initiative. On the Feast of the Assumption, the 15th of August, 1583, when Aloysius was some months over fifteen, he was making his thanksgiving after Communion before a picture of Our Lady, now called "Our Lady of Good Counsel" because of the counsel she gave Aloysius on this her Feast. As he knelt, there came to him, welling up from the deeps of his being, an absolute, final, unshakable conviction as to God's will for him: he was to enter the Society of Jesus, and he immediately told Father Patterno of his decision. He also told his mother and got her to sound his father.

Ferrante, be it remembered, had always known less of what went on in Aloysius's mind than he showed to Donna Marta. He also took it far less seriously, living in hopes that this tiresomeness would wear itself out in due course. He now behaved as if the idea had been thrown at his head for the first time—in a sense perhaps it had if, as seems likely, he had hitherto refused it harbourage. He raged at Aloysius, threatening to have him flogged—an inane threat in view of the punishment his son regularly inflicted on himself, and one more indication that Ferrante had never really taken in what Aloysius was at or what he made a habit of doing. He raged also at Donna Marta, sent for Patterno and raged at him, accusing him of wishing to kidnap Aloysius for the Jesuits. The confessor's very quiet denial shamed him into a short-lived calm, after which he rushed about the court almost shrieking out his fury against his son. The court enjoyed the comedy and, one gathers, put its money on Aloysius.

Then came an unexpected climax. The Prince of the Asturias died of smallpox, and Aloysius, deciding that he had now nothing that could be called a duty at court, went to the Jesuit College and made it clear that he had come to stay. His servants were aghast, the Jesuits hardly less so. Ferrante, imprisoned with gout, sent orders that he was to come home. Aloysius returned word that "what must be done to-morrow might as well be done to-day." Ferrante replied that he refused to be made a spectacle. If Aloysius must enter, let him enter as became his family and

from his own house. It was the right note. Aloysius got up and went home. Besides, he thought his father had promised his consent.

By no means. They did indeed return to Italy, though only after further reproaches in which Annibal Gonzaga, the Franciscan General, was invited to join and refused; he had been through it all himself about his own vocation and would not help to drag Aloysius over the same harrows. He a little calmed Ferrante, as much by existing as by his words, for his position showed that a Gonzaga could come to the front in more ways than one.

So they set sail in the spring of 1584, Aloysius under the impression that his father had given his consent. It was the 28th of July before they reached Genoa, pursued into the Gulf of Lyons by corsairs. "Perhaps we shall all be martyrs" had been Aloysius's cry—he had been the calmest person on board. Poor boy, no such short way out was granted him. For in Italy Ferrante went back on everything.

He began by apparently falling in with Aloysius's wishes, but actually playing for time—the boy was sent off on a round of farewell visits, in which he encountered the full force of the Gonzaga disappointment and disapproval. Rather oddly, he won over nearly everyone who would discuss the case on its merits, everyone, that is, who was prepared to consider a religious vocation as seriously possible for a Prince of the Empire. One of his gains was Federico Borromeo; who was to succeed his uncle, St. Charles, in the see of Milan. The Gonzaga prelates, too, especially Scipio Gonzaga, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Cardinal della Rovere, in the main came down on his side. Aloysius had won the first round. The Gonzagas had to make up their minds to an ecclesiastical career for him.

He returned to Castiglione with this unpalatable success behind him, expecting Ferrante to give him leave to go. But the Gonzagas, having yielded so far, stood out for an ecclesiastical career according to their ideas of family repute—which was not what he had set his heart on at all. Theologians were sent to



argue with him, "doing the devil's work," as one of them frankly said, and were clever enough to tackle him on the side of idealism: let him take to religion if he must, but let him do it in a practical, unselfish way. The mere fact that he saw so much amiss with the world was a call to share in the grind of putting it right. And there was Borromeo, whom he venerated, to lend point to the plea.

When it failed, they veered round and suggested one of the more austere Orders—from which, of course, he could have been dragged and thrust into some wealthy see. He knew, and they knew, and he knew they knew he knew, that his consent would deliver him into their hands. He replied with patient irony that the Society of Jesus was quite austere enough for him, and they had to realize that their ruse had been seen through.

Such a battle of elegant wits had its exhilarating side; it exercised his brains and his deftness in speech, while leaving him emotionally untouched. Quite other was it when the good old Archpriest took a hand, the man who had baptised him and watched lovingly over his first progress in the Faith. He now was turned on to work on the boy's affections, and with him Aloysius dropped his guard altogether. Instead of the refined fencing to which he had treated the theologians he now spoke simply from his heart. And the old man, deeply touched, came over to his side.

Ferrante meanwhile had been careful not to know too much of what was going on. He would leave Aloysius to learn from other lips exactly how wrong-headed and foolish he was being. Intelligence like his must yield in the end. When the last theologian had gone Ferrante sent for his son and asked what he meant to do. "Enter the Society of Jesus," replied Aloysius. Ferrante, savagely disappointed, did not this time make a scene; but he ordered Aloysius out of his sight, Aloysius, thinking he had been forbidden the house, had some necessities packed and departed to a villa a mile outside the town, where he spent some weeks in blissful peace before Ferrante's wrath died down enough to make room for curiosity. No one had dared tell him where

Aloysius was, and when he learned he angrily sent to have him fetched home, rated him and ordered him to his room. Cooling a little, he presently sent a gentleman to see what was happening. The messenger, who had had a hole bored in the door, reported that Aloysius was scourging his bare shoulders before the Crucifix. Ferrante at first refused to believe this story, but during the night curiosity again awoke. Next day he had himself carried to the door of his son's room—he was crippled with gout—and was appalled at the sight. Ordering the door to be broken down he went in, where old bloodstains on the floor told him that this was no new or passing whim. Until that moment, it looks as if Ferrante had never taken in what Aloysius's penances meant.

The sight produced an extraordinary impression. At last he realized what he was "up against." There was no more *Gonzaghina*—things were too serious for that. Every day, too, Aloysius begged leave to go. At last Ferrante wrote to Scipio Gonzaga, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who lived in Rome, asking him to tell the General of the Jesuits, Claudius Acquaviva, that his son wished to enter the Society. Acquaviva, returning a favourable reply, suggested that the novitiate had better be made in Rome. Aloysius, nearly beside himself with joy, wrote to Acquaviva, "I shall be able to say with assurance: *Facta est tranquillitas magna*—there came a great calm." He thought the fight was over.

### 5. *Cooled in Running Water*

How much easier it would have been for both if they could have parted at once! But Aloysius, as a Prince of the Empire, had to obtain the Emperor's leave to abdicate. And the long delay, filled with tedious legal business, gave Ferrante ample time to reconsider.

He started off well, making no difficulties about the application to the Emperor. The negotiations were allowed to get into train, so long and so complicated that to unravel them now would take

almost as much paper and ink as they originally required. Aloysius's life for months was punctuated with legal matters, against a background of bored waiting for the next development. It was the most trying phase of his whole career. Aloysius was never good at doing nothing.

Not that he did nothing now. Ferrante, tied to his couch with gout, was in urgent need of a reliable substitute to conduct his affairs. No grass grew under his son's feet; he was sent hither and yon "on business," said Cepari noncommittally, sometimes apparently political negotiations with other states, sometimes in all probability raising loans to meet Ferrante's gambling debts. He acquitted himself so well that he increased his father's sense of injury. Immured in his sick room and racked by gout, Ferrante had ample time to reflect on how impossible it would be to spare his eldest son.

Aloysius was too much away from home to be in touch with the workings of his father's mind. His most restful period was the seven or eight months he spent at Milan, for his "business" left him long hours which he spent in the lecture rooms of the Brera College, chiefly improving his mathematics. He took no notes in class but listened attentively, then went home and either dictated or wrote out the whole from memory without a slip. Some of these papers remain in his own handwriting, to testify to his prodigious powers of memory and concentration.

There were, however, relaxations, not all of a kind he cared for. At carnival time, finding himself more or less forced to appear, he did so mounted on a mule and followed by only two servants, a scandalously short allowance for a man of his rank in those days. This tilt at the conventions amused or edified according to taste; to Aloysius it meant that, if he were to touch the world, he would only do so with a barge pole. Better were the hours when he persuaded the College porter, a Jesuit lay-brother, to let him have the keys and play at doorkeeping for a day. This is the first hint of the new Aloysius who is taking shape through these difficult times—a more genial, simple-

hearted Aloysius, more childlike, less everlastingly on the defensive, readier to be happy in simple ways. Aloysius was born old. He now begins to become young enough for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Suddenly the idyll was interrupted. Ferrante appeared in Milan unannounced. The act of abdication, ratified by the Emperor, had reached him at Castiglione, awakening all his passionate objection to his son's choice of a life. He hastened to Milan as fast as a litter could carry him, to bring every conceivable pressure to bear to break that son's resolution.

Ferrante had much of reason on his side. He was now a very sick man, rightly concerned about his successor. His younger sons were no sort of substitute for Aloysius. Rodolfo was a vicious fool, without brains or character—his one redeeming trait is that he could submit to Aloysius's moral ascendancy without jealousy. Francesco, though more reliable, had none of Aloysius's brilliance. The younger ones showed no particular promise, unless for general unsatisfactoriness—in the event, the most hopeful of them was to be murdered at fifteen, while the remaining two outdid even Rodolfo in a kind of feeble flashiness. Ferrante's attitude commands respect.

All the old batteries were trained on Aloysius again, but now with a new big gun—he would break his father's heart and bring him to his grave. Ferrante enlisted everyone he could think of to argue with his son—a remarkable tribute, for it meant that only by convincing his reason could he hope to bend his will. After various bouts the most accomplished theologian in the city, Father Achilles Gagliardi, was brought in to argue with Aloysius in the presence of his father.

Gagliardi put out his whole strength. "No one ever felt my pulse like that before!" said Aloysius afterwards. Every possible objection was put to him in plain and forcible terms. He admitted that he felt shaken, for a moment even dismayed. Yet it was Aloysius who triumphed. Both Gagliardi and Ferrante acknowledged his vocation as a genuine call from God. Ferrante promised to withdraw his opposition and returned home.

Aloysius shortly followed him to Castiglione, expecting to get his outfit together and go.

Not a bit. Ferrante again went back on his word, and Aloysius, really angry for once, wrote to Acquaviva begging to be allowed to disobey his father and enter the Society of Jesus without his permission. The General of the Jesuits told him that that could only be a last resource; he must try everything else first and try his hardest. So Aloysius resumed the struggle.

His first step was to seek human allies. The Archduchess Eleanor, Duchess of Mantua, the Emperor's aunt, had already befriended him, helping him to obtain his permission to abdicate. So to her he first went. But Mantua was in a turmoil, first over the visit of certain Christian Japanese nobles, then over one of those brilliant weddings destined, as so many were, to turn to great misery. Finding no one at leisure for his affairs, Aloysius went to the Jesuit College in Mantua to make a retreat, and in its course he studied the Jesuit Constitutions. From this time he threw himself wholly upon God, trusting to spiritual weapons alone.

Back at Castiglione, his penances grew so severe that his mother begged his father to let him enter a religious house, in order that someone might have authority to check his practices. But Ferrante, tackled by Aloysius, flatly denied that he had ever given permission for his departure. He seems to have felt that he would have to give in some day—he took the line that Aloysius's health was not equal to the strain of life in a religious Order, and that he must wait till he was twenty-five. Aloysius was then barely seventeen, an age at which eight years is half eternity.

Aloysius was very gravely perturbed. After reflection, he tried to drive a bargain with his father. He would accept the terms, but on two conditions: he must be allowed to go to Rome so as to study without constant interruptions; and he must have a letter to the General of the Jesuits, with a definite promise that he might enter at some specified date, say in two or three years' time.

So the weariful negotiations started again. Happily they broke down—Aloysius must have been nearly desperate to imagine that such a cracked-brained scheme could work, and had cause to be grateful to the Gonzaga self-importance which wrecked it. Everyone concerned stood out for something and refused to budge an inch. Deadlock was soon reached. No one could move without an undignified climbdown. The jam was complete.

There was only one thing left to do, and Aloysius did it: he prayed. One day, on a sudden impulse, he rose from his knees, went to his father's room and said "Father, I place myself entirely in your hands. Do as you please with me. But I assure you that I have been called to the Society of Jesus by God, and in resisting this vocation, you are resisting God." Having so spoken he at once left the room.

Ferrante turned his face to the wall and wept. His attendants apparently had not heard what Aloysius had said, for they were mystified at his grief, which cast a gloom over the whole household. After several hours, Ferrante roused himself and sent for his son. "Aloysius," he said, "you have wounded me to the heart, because I love you and have always loved you, as you deserve. On you are fixed all my hopes, and my family's. But since God, as you tell me, calls you, I will not stop you. Go where you wish, and I give you my blessing."<sup>1</sup>

The surrender was final. After this, no more obstacles were put in Aloysius's path. The legal snags were surmounted at last. Aloysius had a slight tussle with his mother, her idea of an outfit being more generous than his own. Determined to be poor, he managed to bring her down to about four times what the average young Jesuit took into the novitiate. Not that he realized it at the time—like other princely saints, his notions of poverty were still a little unreal. But the will was there, the eager ardent choice, and it carried him through all. On the 2nd of November, 1585, there was a great assembly of Gonzagas to witness his abdication in favour of the-delighted Rodolfo. Afterwards, he changed his

<sup>1</sup> Martindale, p. 120.

court dress for the religious habit he was henceforth to wear, made a round of good-byes, and next day started for Rome.

The journey was one of the happiest episodes in his life. He still had a considerable retinue. The court doctor was in charge, the court chaplain also accompanied him and, a great joy, Del Turco joined him too. Rodolfo convoyed him to the first river-crossing. On the boat a gentleman remarked how happy Rodolfo must be to succeed to the marquisate. "Not half so happy as I am to get rid of it!" replied Aloysius, and indeed his bearing was that of a prisoner released. They went to Loretto to redeem a vow of his mother's made at his birth, and there he was blissfully happy until his identity got about and people came to gape.

Then he resumed his journey, generally riding alone, for the most part reciting prayers. He said Prime before setting out of a morning, Vespers and Compline after the stoppage for the midday meal. As far as he talked, it was about his hope of going on the missions—the *Lettere delle Indie* were still his most shining dream. He had been forbidden to fast on the journey, but would never have a fire in his room—and November in North Italy can be cold.

And at last he got rid of the servants whose ministrations he had so long loathed. On this journey he began to dress and undress himself, making heavy weather of his stockings at first. The chaplain, who shared his room at the inns, had to come to his help, and so discovered that his feet were like lumps of ice. But he proved unpersuadable about a fire and went his way, as nearly in a flutter of happy spirits as we are ever to find him. Later he was to come to a much more even, because deeper-lying, contentment. Just now, in the first joy of his release, his soul sang gaily to itself, crooning over the old familiar prayers of his childhood, with little rhythmical movements as of one recalling the half-forgotten steps of a dance.

Rome brought him to earth again, a Rome just learning the unpleasant lesson that murder is a crime, not a pastime, for Pope Sixtus V was restoring order with a heavy hand. Aloysius called on all the Cardinals then in Rome. He also had a long

audience with the Pope, who questioned him minutely about his vocation, fearing as he said that "the tedium of the religious life" would be too much for one with such colourful antecedents. The Pope was not the only person to have doubts. The Vatican corridors swarmed with people come to stare at "this monstrosity of a Gonzaga." Several ecclesiastics thought Aloysius in need of a sermon directly to his address. It was all as boring as a view of cabbages, as dispiriting as a cold douche. It was on no wave of enthusiasm that Aloysius at last bent his steps to Sant' Andrea, the Jesuit house of novices. Yet, as always, he had made friends. Particularly he made friends with his kinsman, Scipio Gonzaga, Patriarch of Jerusalem, without whom he could hardly have found his way through the difficulties besetting his path. For this help Aloysius always retained an eager gratitude to the Patriarch, who on his side had been entirely won. He always spoke of Aloysius as "an angel"—not, of course, a white-nightgowned angel of the Victorian picture books but a Renaissance angel, palpitatingly alive to the last feather in his rainbow wings.

It ended at last. On the morning of the 25th of November, 1585, the Feast of St. Catherine, the Virgin Martyr of Alexandria, Aloysius and the Patriarch, with their retinues, went up to the chapel of Sant' Andrea on the Quirinal. Scipio there said Mass, gave Aloysius Communion, and afterwards accompanied him to breakfast with the General of the Jesuits, Claudius Acquaviva. Here they met the Rector, Father Pescatore, the wise and holy man who was to be Aloysius's novice-master in his new life. He had to listen to one last sermon to his address—poor boy, he was given little chance to be carried away by enthusiasm. Everyone conspired to take the shine out of things for him, fundamentally, of course, the most merciful thing to do, but an appalling strain on youthful patience. There followed a last ordeal, the parting with his weeping servants and the final messages for those at home. Not till Scipio tore himself away would the rest go, leaving Aloysius free to adjust himself to an almost unimaginable change in his way of living.



He had already handed to Acquaviva the letter from his father which more than anything set the seal on his dedication. Here it is, the perfect summing up of the situation :

"Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Sir,

"My profound respects. In the past I considered it to be my duty to refuse to this my son Aloysius permission to enter your holy Society, for I feared that owing to his youth he might embark upon his enterprise without that firm resolution which were right. Now I think that I am sure that it is God who is calling him thither, and so I should feel it on my conscience were I to refuse him the permission that he has longed to receive, and has prayed for from me so urgently and so often. So, freely and willingly, with my mind at peace and full of God's good consolation, I send him and commend him to Your Reverence, who will be to him a more helpful Father than I can be. I have nothing here to add concerning the person of my son. I merely say, that I am giving into Your Reverence's hands the most precious thing that I possess in all the world, and my chiefest hope, that I place entirely in him, of maintaining and giving glory to my Family: my Family henceforward will regard, as its greatest protection, his prayers and those of Your Reverence, to whom I offer all my respects, and for whom I beg from the Lord all the happiness that you can desire. Mantua, November 3, 1585. Your Reverence's most devoted servant, the Prince Marquis of Castiglione."<sup>1</sup>

## 6. *An Interlude for Reflection*

We must now stop and consider a question which has been shouting ever louder for our attention: Was Aloysius right or was he wrong? It could not be tackled sooner, for the facts were not sufficiently assembled. It is, for instance, an aggravation of the case against him that he left his father gravely ill, though no one guessed he was as near to death as he actually was. Now,

<sup>1</sup> Martindale, pp. 128-9.

however, the full tale is before us. What are we to make of it?

Rather oddly, the sentimentality of our age is more favourable to Aloysius than the sentimentality of his own: where we side instinctively with rebel children, the sixteenth century sided as instinctively with parental authority. It took the full weight of the Church's authority to secure to young people the right to choose the religious life in the face of parental opposition. Moreover, the unreasoned, mystic admiration of the sixteenth century was given to princely rank, where with us it goes out to, say, equal incomes. If Aloysius had thrown up his position to marry a poor girl, we should at once applaud. Nor would the applause necessarily die down because he chose to follow the Lady Poverty. We cannot, however, acquit Aloysius merely because he in some points suits our fashion in sentimentality; anyone as unconventional in terms of our own conventions would get even shorter shrift. It has to stand in the count against Aloysius that he affronted the sentimental conventions of his own age.

There are, however, such things as permanent human sentiments. And here Aloysius comes off even worse; his bearing towards his parents does undoubtedly shock. Our spontaneous feeling is one with that of the sixteenth century—Aloysius has to answer the charge of flouting the simple human decencies. With his mother he had an intuitive comradeship which enabled him to take for granted her understanding; had the bond between them been less fine, some of his acts would have been simply harsh. But his father is another matter altogether. Ferrante had far more claim on him than parental authority. He had given Aloysius an appreciation most rare in parents, and had put all his experience and knowledge of the world at the service of his son's exceptional gifts. Aloysius, one feels, might sometimes have carried himself less intransigently towards his father, quite apart from the main issue of disappointing his hopes by his choice of a career.

But the most serious count is moral. Aloysius, it is said, took

the easier path, preferring "a fugitive and cloistered virtue" to the courageous course, which was to live the Christian life in the world, leavening its evil with the force of his example, letting his light shine before men in the Stygian darkness of the diplomatic world.

And beyond that again are the claims of his vassals. Aloysius had it in his power to give the people of Castiglione, Solferino and Castel Goffredo the happiness of a generation's enlightened government, including equitable taxation. Heavy taxes were the curse of Italy and one cause of its frequent famines. Whole countrysides were depopulated, the hunger-stricken people falling an easy victim to the plague. Aloysius thus sacrificed not only his father's ambitions but the happiness of some thousands of human beings who had no hope of decent order save in him. The peasants of Castiglione did in fact revolt against Rodolfo, and Francesco had his work cut out to restore order.

That is the case for the prosecution. It is a case, as regards its two main counts—his treatment of his parents and the broad issue of public morals—exactly the same in the twentieth century as in the sixteenth. Moreover, the sixteenth century saw the point at least as clearly as we do; the main attack on Aloysius's resolution took the form of an appeal to the very considerations we ourselves would stress. William James is entirely wrong in saying that the sixteenth century "paid little heed to social righteousness; and to leave the world to the devil while saving one's own soul was then accounted no discreditable scheme."<sup>1</sup> That misconceives the whole issue.

The importance of saving one's own soul was doubtless more widely understood then than now: "What exchange shall a man give for his soul?" was an idea worked into the texture of men's minds in a way it has quite ceased to be. Therefore, if a man felt unable to save it in the world he could count on a measure of public sympathy if he shortened the odds against him by seeking a more helpful environment and discipline. But this is not at all that Aloysius did. He threw up a responsible public position in

<sup>1</sup> *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 354.

which he had immense opportunities of doing good, so much so that he was called to it by public opinion as well as by his birth and his exceptional talents. For this there was no ready-made sympathy. It is entirely gratuitous to assume that the sixteenth century was blind to its own evils. It was no blinder than the nineteenth, if indeed as blind. Each was of course fuddled by its own mysticism of success, attaching in one case to the Prince, in the other to the Moneymaker. But it was the nineteenth that plumed itself on its evils as "progress." The sixteenth at least did not erect a whole philosophy, from the atom to the universe, on the model of its quite temporary social arrangements. It had the wisdom to dislike those arrangements too much to find in them the clue to the whole of existence. On the point of social righteousness, the sixteenth century showed at least as much power of self-criticism as the age of William James.

And yet, with the triple count against him, of sentimentality as well as enduring human sentiment and public morals, Aloysius did in fact convince his age of the rightness of his choice.

He did so by appealing to a principle our society no longer admits—a direct personal call from God to follow an exceptional line of action. The mere putting forward of the plea did not suffice. He had to implement his assertion, implement it in the face of a closely reasoned statement of the case for the prosecution. Do not think that Aloysius never heard the case for the prosecution. It was dinned into his ears for months on end. Once it nearly convinced himself—which means that he really weighed it up, count by count, and made a serious attempt to grasp its cogency. And yet, he not only turned it down, he convinced all who tackled him that he was right to do so. He won because, in the opinion of the most able judges of such matters, he made out his case. He proved that God had called him.

Unless this plea is a sound one the defence has no case. The only possible justification of Aloysius is that God sometimes requires exceptional action on a higher plane than that of ordinary

human decency, including public duty. The normal has all the claims of normality. But it only remains normal if pulled up in the direction of the supernormal. If this pull is weakened, it sags into subnormality. Hence the instruments of the supernormal pull cannot be dismissed as selfish weaklings.

We need to beware of looking at the issue in terms of our inherited individualism. To Aloysius, individualism was not an inheritance; it was a new intrusion, indeed, the intruder against which his revolt was directed. "A new value for the individual," which we are told was the note of the Renaissance, applied only to fortunate mortals like himself. He united in his person the two forms of good fortune which his age revered, high birth and great personal gifts. In virtue of these he was entitled, by the new individualistic standards, to chuck his weight about precisely as he pleased, with a Nietzschean disregard for less lucky individuals. For God to extend a special call to such as he cannot be dismissed in terms of Aloysius's personal problems, for he was the incarnate symbol of the grand error and idolatry of his age. His vocation, his choice by God, thus has social implications of the most far-reaching kind. It is in fact a kind of Divine criticism, in the name of social order, upon the new individualism of the age which was to have such destructive effects in the future.

Naturally, however, a boy as young as was Aloysius during his years of conflict could not have worked all this out for himself; for one thing, the future was hidden from him. The interest of his call is in part that it came before he had disentangled himself enough from his environment to *see* it instead of taking it for granted. His reaction was inspired from within by impulses he did not understand, could not resist, and most certainly did not initiate—it was the work of a Wisdom standing above all generations and seeing them as a whole. And such a call, welling up in the depths of the individual, had to have utterly overwhelming urgency if it was to hold its own against the resistances encountered. For those resistances came not only from what was wrong in the age, but even more poignantly from what it had of good and right.

This brings us to a point of the first importance. Unless God has freedom to make such exceptional calls, in the teeth of human normality and incomprehensible to the outlook of an age, He cannot intervene to correct evils; He lacks a rope to draw men along paths they cannot yet appreciate but which are vital to their well-being. If Aloysius had made the insight of his age his final court of appeal he would have crushed his sense of vocation exactly as a modern boy would hold it right to do—only artists are now allowed to set vocation above family claims and ordinary social obligations. But if Aloysius had done so, he would have simply illustrated the false maxim about “the new value of the individual.” As it was, God was able to use him to criticize, if not confound, that maxim, because to the men of his times he seemed the born illustration of it. . . . It is often the morality of an age, rather than its immorality, which is most apt to hamper God’s action in the world.

Therefore a corrective which every society needs is the power to recognize exceptional calls from God, even when those exceptional calls run counter to what it has hailed as new moral insights. As such calls must always concern issues to which the age is blind, they cannot be tested by their content; they can only be tested by their origin. Where does such and such an urge come from? Is it the individual’s selfwill, his escapism or his desire for display? Is it pathological, to be explained in terms of disease, whether of body or mind? Is it perhaps diabolical suggestion? Or is it a call from God? The society which can recognize such an exceptional divine call, in the teeth of its fashionable prepossessions, keeps open within itself a fount of cleansing and renewal.

There is another difficulty, lying so far back in our minds that perhaps we have never consciously thought of it at all. It concerns neither sociology, past or present, nor even Aloysius himself. It is a difficulty about God. How could God want Aloysius to act as he did? That is the real rub. How could it be God’s will for Aloysius to give so much pain, to swerve from so great an opportunity of public service, to set his own soul before

the bodies of his fellow-men? What sort of God could possibly want such things?

The answer is simpler than one might think: the sort of God who was incarnate in Jesus. Aloysius merely translated into act the Voice that cried "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth. . . . What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul? . . . Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee. . . . I came not to send peace, but the sword. . . . The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away. . . . This kind [of evil spirit] is not cast out but by prayer and fasting. . . . He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me. . . . If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For he that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it."

The first thing to lay to heart is that we cannot query Aloysius without also querying Christ. If these words of Christ are ever to be translated into action, it will be the sort of action taken by Aloysius Gonzaga. We are so made that the teaching of Christ is apt to remain for us mere words, possibly even pretty-pretty words, until we see it embodied in a human life. Then only do we realize its explosive force. If Christianity is to remain revolutionary it cannot do without Saints. For it is the Saints who hold before our eyes the Gospel embodied in terms of contemporary life.

Some Saints belong wholly to their own epoch. In others, their revolutionary significance continues for generations, even centuries. Great Saints are many-sided and reflect the light in many directions. Aloysius, for instance, can do our age one great service—he can spur us to reconsider our picture of Jesus. If he heads us back to the real Jesus he will give us a piece of help we greatly need, for he will cleanse our minds from that unreal Jesus who was an amiable moralist interested in making the world safe for democracy. The real Jesus was not interested in making

the world safe for anybody, and His best exponents are those who live dangerously. . . . Every generation has its version of the fantasy which demands a coward's paradise here on earth. For us, as for other generations, our own fantasy is the thing of all others that comes between us and God. If Aloysius helps to explode our coward's paradise he will have done something much more relevant than providing the world with an example of the Ideal Despot.

If this heroic plane is not admitted there is no answer to the case against Aloysius Gonzaga. There is also no answer to the case against Christ.

Let us beware of overstatement. There are two things this does not mean. It does not mean that Aloysius was right in every detail of his conduct; what it would justify is the main effort of his life. Every human soul is the battleground of contending forces, and as the fight sways back and forth things may be done and said which a detached judgement rightly deplores. The actual fighting is, however, rarely done in detachment, particularly in its earlier, more amateurish phases. It is enough that the main strategy, the objectives and as far as may be the methods, are in a general way attuned to that Sword which Christ sent upon earth.

The other thing it does not mean is that Aloysius Gonzaga exhausts the possibilities of sanctity. There are many other ways of being a Saint. The life of Aloysius does not body forth the whole Gospel. Only the life of Christ can do that. A Saint embodies only a selection, an aspect, a fragment of the truth that is in Jesus. The point is that, through his ductility to the shaping Hand of God, he embodies the precise selection or fragment or aspect which God desires to stress. A Saint is often thus God's criticism upon contemporary trends, and the criticism varies with the defects of any particular society. Some ages are too lax and need to be tightened up; others are too rigid and need to re-learn the secret of freedom. Some are inflated with self-confidence and need to be shown their weakness; others are numb with despair and need a sight of God's strength. Some



are too disorderly, others too tidy. But in no case is the message of the Saint spontaneously welcome to his age. He is raised up by God as a mirror in which the age may see itself as God sees it—and that is a sight from which men normally shrink.

The mere fact that we find Aloysius repulsive, then, need not mean that he is wrong and we right. It is quite as likely to mean that we have gone so far from God that we furiously resent the truth about ourselves. A Saint is always in his measure "a sign to be spoken against," as his Lord was. That St. Aloysius has been abundantly spoken against is part of his credentials from Christ.

From this standpoint, let us run roughly through the two important counts, his intransigence to his parents, and his refusal of practical service in the world as he found it.

The parental problem was solved by lifting it to the heroic plane. Donna Marta had always lived there; she had early accepted a role in its measure like that of Mary at the foot of the Cross. And Ferrante before his death joined his wife and son—he was pulled up to their level, instead of dragging them down to his. That is how God Himself solved this heart-piercing tension.

Here then is the story of Ferrante.

Scarcely had Aloysius gone when a change came over the Prince Marquis which surprised no one more than himself. He had the ebony and silver crucifix removed from his son's room to his own, and daily recited the Penitential Psalms, marvelling at his own tears. His passion for gambling left him altogether, though hitherto it had been a tyrannous yoke. When the court chaplain returned from escorting Aloysius to Rome, Ferrante made a general confession of his whole life. This was at Mantua, whither he had had himself conveyed. As he grew worse, he went on to Milan in search of medical aid. And there one night he had a strangely late visitor; his cousin, the General of the Franciscans, asked to see him. Ferrante jumped, correctly, to the conclusion that he was being tactfully warned to prepare himself for death. He did so quietly and methodically, and on the 13th of February, less than four months after the parting

from Aloysius, he died tranquilly and at peace, confident that he owed his late access of grace to the prayers of his boy.

I find it quite impossible to be sorry for Ferrante, especially as all his hopes for his son's glory were to be royally fulfilled. I am much sorrier for Aloysius, to whom his father's death was a stunning blow. Even so, his instant thought was for his mother. But his letters to her offer no consolation save that of the heroic plane on which both lived. Ferrante and Donna Marta, though in different degrees, were associated with the sacrificial life to which they surrendered the son of their love, and both found in that their more than sufficient reward, even here on earth. If we cannot accept this heroic solution there is no solution—unless we care to count that school of thought which would interpret Ferrante's death as "a judgement" on Aloysius. It was certainly a soul-sifting test. God had taken him at his word with staggering promptitude. Castiglione had passed to Rodolfo.

So we come to the most formidable count in the indictment—that Aloysius owed it to the people of Castiglione to fulfil their sole hope of a spell of good government; and that he would have acted more courageously had he remained in the world to leaven its diplomacy with his Christian example.

This criticism depends for its force on the issue of practicability. And at the outset we have to beware of a piece of unreality—we are not discussing whether *anyone* should have acted like this, we are discussing Aloysius. Was it really possible for Aloysius, being what he was and not someone quite different, to live the life of a sixteenth-century prince and diplomat in such a way as to raise the tone of the world about him?

That would depend in the first place on whether he could keep up his standards enough to remain an effective moral agent. Now, Aloysius knew by experience that only a very exacting personal discipline enabled him to maintain such a personal standard. Yet to work effectively in the world he would have had to curtail that discipline. Thus there is a vicious circle. It was his moral force that gave rise to the demand for a life of

service in the world; yet to live in the world he would have had to curtail the discipline which alone generated that moral force. Aloysius said he could not do it. As he was the only person who tried, his opinion is entitled to be taken seriously.

A similar difficulty arises over his vocation. His sense of vocation was as much part of Aloysius as Saint Joan of Arc's Voices were part of her. We know what happened when St. Joan let herself be talked into denying her Voices; she was flung into the anguish of a divided mind, plus the tormented sense of having betrayed her cause. If Aloysius had let himself be talked over, he would have found himself in a similar fix.

It is impossible to think of the actual Aloysius—not some figment of the imagination but the flesh-and-blood man—achieving anything under the sense that he had been a traitor to the truth of his own soul. Had he attempted the course proposed by his critics, of his age or of ours, he would certainly have gone downhill, for he would have lost the sense that God was with him. He would have suffered a process of moral attrition, slow perhaps at first, but gaining in momentum as despair took hold upon him. . . . Christ bids us pray that we be not led into temptation, that is, into misery that crushes and numbs the endeavour of the soul. Aloysius in the world would have been either paralysed or galvanized by despair, quite likely each in turn. The result might have been many things, but hardly good government for Castiglione or a Christian lead in international politics.

Moreover, even if he had—clean contrary to the psychological probabilities—maintained his standard while stifling his sense of vocation, it does not follow that his example would have produced the expected fruit. The story of St. Thomas More is there to warn us how little a good man may achieve in impossible circumstances, even when for him those circumstances are God's call. God has regard to the differences in His children; if He called More to this difficult course, More had no heredity to contend with at all comparable to the Gonzaga blood. He would have been an equable soul if he had not been a Saint, whereas

Aloysius owed the whole possibility of balance to his sanctity. God does not try men above that they are able.

The story of St. Thomas More is an important foil to that of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, for both, though in different ways, reacted against the ideal of statecraft codified by Machiavelli. It is noteworthy that More's successful opponent, Thomas Cromwell, was a conscious and fully deliberate disciple of *The Prince*. When this theory of *Realpolitik*, the power-politics of the sixteenth century, was still young and untried, More attempted to oppose it with a Christian life lived amid the press of worldly business. God had, that is, already given the world the Christian man of the world, and the world had cut off his head. By the middle of the sixteenth century the conditions were even less favourable, and by the end practically hopeless. Why, then, should God have wasted another life upon it? Condemnation, not leavening, was the need. If the sixteenth century was to be challenged in the name of Christ, it would take something besides the Christian man of the world to press the challenge home.

There remain the pathetic ghosts of the people of Castiglione, clutching our heartstrings as none of the rest can do.

Once again, it is essential to take a realistic view of the situation. What would Aloysius have gained for his vassals had he accepted the role of Ideal Despot and—clean contrary, remember, to psychological probability—carried it through successfully? What he would have really achieved would have been the riveting of their fetters. A system which he had deigned to operate would have been held consecrated by his touch. If he had made a success of his government he would have lent his moral prestige to an iniquitous system. It was better for Castiglione that the evil order should be seen for what it was—evil—yes, at the price of one happy lifetime. Though even that was hardly within the bounds of serious probability.

Had Aloysius done what his critics proposed he would have helped to perpetuate the vileness his every fibre loathed. He would have weakened his own criticism of the existing order by condescending to operate the filthy thing. And it is more than

probable that the foul machine would have swept him into its circuit; instead of his pulling it up it would have dragged him down. At best, he might have been a martyr like St. Thomas More. But martyrdom is a *pis aller*, a last resource when deadlock has been reached, a confession that the world refuses to be leavened and must be simply withstood. The death of More is the justification of Aloysius; between them they exhausted the possible Christian attitudes to Machiavellian *Realpolitik*. Since Aloysius as Ideal Despot would almost certainly have betrayed Christ, shall we lament that God cast him for the Writing on the Wall?

For he did in fact write MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN across the face of his age—"God has numbered thy kingdom, and hath finished it—thou art weighed in the balance, and are found wanting—thy kingdom is divided, and is given (elsewhere)." His renunciation sent an uneasy tremor through the world he had left. It did not reform, at least on any notable scale; perhaps it had gone too far for anything but the revolution which engulfed it. But it lost the chance to preen itself, saying, "We can't be as bad as all that—did not Aloysius Gonzaga accept these conditions?" He refused the conditions, and men shivered as they stared after him, feeling the shadow of the Judgement of God.

### 7. *The Last Forging*

Aloysius Gonzaga was seventeen when he entered the Jesuit noviceship at Sant' Andrea in Rome. He died at the age of twenty-three, too young alike for ordination and for his final vows. These six years therefore were filled with what was meant to be no more than the training for his life-work. During his last illness, one of his superiors could not believe it possible that he was going to die, so certain did it seem that God had given Aloysius to the Society of Jesus simply and solely that he might one day govern it. It was God who adjudged his work done before human wisdom though it well begun. There is no making sense of the story save from a divine point of view.

Two things must be kept in mind about the whole six years. The first is that Aloysius had all the time wretched health. Authority had come too late to save him from himself; even a physique as magnificent as his had been undermined beyond repair. They did their best to build him up, making him eat "as much in a day as he had in a week," says Father Martindale, and giving him a room to himself when his insomnia became known. It was a very noisy room, so that the kind intention remained unfulfilled, for Aloysius never complained—poverty meant just things of this kind, and Aloysius was in love with poverty. His penances, of course, were stopped, and they tried too to stop his over-concentration, stiffening his collar to make him hold his head up (it had got set in a drooping position), forbidding him to meditate more than half the usual time, putting him to studies which would take his mind off spiritual things, and at last forbidding him to concentrate on spiritual subjects at all. Yet the non-stop headaches went on, indeed, were probably made worse by this total prohibition; for Aloysius found it as difficult to detach his mind from God as most people do to think about Him.

We have to grasp all this rather firmly in our imaginations in order to appreciate the second thing, the sunny serenity which we find in the Aloysius of these years. He was never well, often actively ill, rarely free from pain of some kind; yet we cannot but feel him a fundamentally happy person. All disturbances are on the surface; underneath is a deep, untroubled sea of content. Gone is the bewildered boy indiscriminately on the defensive; he is now where God would have him to be, and since he is sure of meeting God in all his circumstances, everything that happens is the dear and welcome will of God.

And the new life offered him one very big thing, something in the nature of equal friendship. Not that all the youths in the noviceship were of his calibre, or invariably grateful for the standard he set. They called him Our Generalino, our Young General, and some, at least, found his company trying; the pace was too fast. But while there were rubs of this kind, it remains

that he found, perhaps rather among those a little older than himself, a real give-and-take, a response on his own level from men who accepted the same standards and burned with the same ardours. This had never come his way before; and it is gracious and human that, with all that set him in a class apart, he yet depended on his fellows for understanding and affection.

For the new Aloysius was affectionate. His natural tendency was to be a man of a few deep loves, throwing to the world at large nothing more than his careless, unconscious power to charm. The few deep loves remain, but there begins to be an overflow from them into all his relationships, so that on a journey, for instance, he devoted himself to the coachmen. The casualness in a sense remained; the charm of his thoughtfulness in small services is still his unconsciousness in the doing. Yet there is a new quality in all his intercourse, born, it would seem, of his deep sense of being at last at home. Or as much at home as he ever could be on earth. It was as he met men in God that Aloysius found himself able to give himself to them, meeting them on that high plane of single-minded love on which he habitually dwelt. In a sense, they became to him more and more shadows in the overmastering reality of God; but they were now happy shadows, and it is from his rootedness in the Divine that he finds roots of reality even in the shadow-world of men.

He had his downs to be sure as well as his ups. The shattering news of his father's death caught him at a moment already difficult—his first retreat had had to be cut short owing to a sudden collapse. At the time this was put down to strain, but Father Martindale very sensibly suggests that it was due to the cessation of strain. For years Aloysius had been battling grimly towards this goal. Now, the goal attained, there was nothing more to fight towards. The world became blank, as featureless as the open sea, bare of the landmarks by which he had hitherto set his course. And into this bleak, meaningless landscape there thunderbolted the challenge of Ferrante's death. Aloysius found himself going over the old weary ground again, but this time in a grey dreariness of spirit in which everything looked different.

He never seems to have doubted his vocation. What he did doubt was whether his vocation was to the Society of Jesus; he wondered whether he had the qualities for that particular life. And these depressions alternated with fits of conceit. . . . No beginner can be expected to know how normal all this is, something that everyone goes through, though doubtless in the measure of his own temperament. In the case of a Gonzaga, the savage vitality of his race made the measure a hard one. Few have more needed experienced direction if he was not to waste that vitality on a series of barren experiments.

Such direction was, of course, one of the big things which the Society of Jesus had to offer him, and he knew it. His self-estimate—"I am a piece of twisted iron; I entered religion in order to get twisted straight"—shows the spirit in which he gave himself up to be formed by the Jesuit training. He did not expect that training not to be hard; if it had not been often against the grain he would have suspected that something was wrong. He had much to learn; he wished to learn it; and he did not ask to get that learning on the cheap.

By his own admission, his greatest difficulty was on the side of obedience, though this could not have been guessed from his conduct. To a noble of that period, taking orders from men of inferior birth cannot have meant nothing. It meant less to Aloysius than to many; still, we should note it. For his indifference was noted by Aloysius himself as definitely a special grace from God. When asked "whether it was difficult for a great nobleman to abandon the vanities of the world, he answered that it was utterly impossible unless Our Lord put clay upon his eyes, as He did to the man born blind."<sup>1</sup> This keen realization sheds light on something very marked in his conduct, the eagerness with which he submitted to his superiors, seeing in them the direct representatives of Our Lord.

What bothered him most—by his own testimony, for it did not appear in his deeds—was obeying those whom he knew to be his intellectual inferiors. He was quick to recognize real

<sup>1</sup> Cepari, p. 205.



superiority; his novice-master, Father Pescatore, commanded both his affection and his respect on account of great gifts of mind and character. But this very penetration made Aloysius recognize a stupid order when he met one, recognize too that behind it lay stupidity, not a higher intelligence putting him to a test his immaturity could not yet appreciate. It is all the more remarkable that we know of this difficulty only from his own lips. In action, his failing seemed to be an almost too literal obedience which at times obliterated his common sense.

But if obedience was in some sort against the grain (in spite of a clear intellectual appreciation of its spiritual value), poverty was a dear delight. If anything, he had to be restrained; once when he objected to being given a new cassock they warned him that this could be a form of self-love, a desire to shine in poverty, so to speak. He yielded at once, knowing very well that his danger always lay to the side of self-will. But where there was no obvious duty to yield, he preferred to take things as they came, without comment either good or ill, parading neither his disgust nor his delight—for what point is there in a poverty that never awakens disgust? Reserved as he normally was, he was more reserved about his love of poverty than anything; to him it was a Holy of Holies profaned even by praise.

There are many stories of this silent acceptance. A room which he occupied for some months was described by his successor in it as "more like a latrine than a bedroom." It is about ten feet square, lighted by a skylight in a low roof which can be touched with the hand, furnished with a bed, a chair, a table, and a shelf for books. In the same spirit, when he had been twenty-four hours in the infirmary with erysipelas, it took a visitor to point out that there were no sheets on his bed; the infirmarian having left him with blankets only, Aloysius accepted what came without a word. On his deathbed, the desire to have nothing at all made him beg to have the hangings at least removed, since they would not let him lie on the floor. Both requests were refused.

The most perfect story, however, is of a journey that brought

him to an overcrowded inn, where a nobleman's train was shortly expected. All the innkeeper could, or maybe would, give the two Jesuits was a room where they would have to share a bed. His companion, after a warm altercation, turned to the silent Aloysius saying, "You at least ought to be treated with respect." Aloysius replied, "He takes us for poor men, and so we are. . . ." Once, a priest who had formerly seen him magnificently attired and attended, caught a glimpse of him cleaning his boots, his hands numb with cold; and the sight brought home the scale of his abasement. To Aloysius, such details were the sign-manual of his escape from intolerable fetters.

The young Jesuits of that period used to serve in the hospitals, ill-managed, overcrowded, dirty, unventilated, where an amateur nurse wakened no surprise save at his pluck. Skill they were left to acquire as they could. Many found this service peculiarly revolting; Aloysius it filled with nausea; moreover, he proved to be one of those people who turn faint at the sight of blood. But he never gave in. He never got over his disagreeable sensations either; they noticed that he used to seize filthy bandages with a little pounce, which showed the effort needed to drive himself to touch them. Yet at the end, he was rebuked for the urgency with which he begged to be allowed to go to the hospitals.

Teaching children was another trial and a thing he never became good at. But at handling men he was something of a genius. "He used to get on to the little stages in the markets where jacks-of-all-trades and quack doctors used to hold forth: in no time the place was thronged to listen to him: cardinals stopped their carriages to see what he was saying: he used to march back to the college, or a church, at the head of a troop of men persuaded to go to confession, and nobody else collected so many or managed them so well, and they were not only country-folks come in to Rome for marketing, but the scum of the City itself."<sup>1</sup>

There remains one more shrinking, the worst, that defensive-

<sup>1</sup> Martindale, pp. 157-8.

ness bred of his long lonely fight against the lures of "the world." It is not enough to show that this attitude is understandable, even pardonable. One does not speak of pardoning Saints, and Aloysius will not have made out his title to sanctity unless this shrinking too is finally overcome. Indeed, this is for him the crucial test; in the story of Aloysius "the world" plays the same role as the leper in the story of St. Francis of Assisi. It is the ultimate challenge, his fear come to life. We have yet to see Aloysius take his fear in his arms, embrace it, and after a fashion change clothes with it, in a decisive gesture which shows that he no longer dreads its contagion. Aloysius, as well as Francis, must kiss his leper.

As has been indicated, he experienced a partial release once he felt sure he could not be thrust back into the world again. That is good, but it is not enough. The struggle, though less preoccupying, goes on through his years of noviceship and after he has taken his simple vows, only it takes on new forms which he had not foreseen.

Aloysius is so alarmingly mature for his age that one is grateful for every reminder that he was, after all, just a kid. And over this matter he made an amusingly boyish miscalculation; he assumed that the world, so sternly rejected, would accept his sentence and "stay put." He did not foresee what any grown man would have foreseen, that the world would be enormously intrigued by his rejection, so much so that it would run after him more assiduously than ever, out of sheer curiosity. Besides, Aloysius never allowed enough for his unconscious power of charm; he could not realize how difficult people found it to forget him. Hence, to his surprise, even his anger, he found the last word had not been said. The world would not leave him alone. It persisted in regarding him as a Prince Marquis strayed out of his place, when he was hugging himself at being Brother Aluigi, a person of no standing or importance, the last and least of the servants of God.

And the first reaction was boyish too—they wouldn't believe he meant it, wouldn't they? Well, he'd show them! As a result

She also found an ally in the other mother most concerned, the Archduchess Eleanor, now Dowager Duchess of Mantua, plagued in Duke Vincent with a son almost as trying as Rodolfo. At last the two ladies put their heads together and decided that there was only one person able to cope with the situation: Aloysius. He had a rare ascendancy over Rodolfo, and was the only person to whom Vincent was likely to listen at all. They therefore wrote south, Donna Marta to Aloysius, the Archduchess to the General of the Jesuits: Would not, could not, Aloysius come, since his coming might avert civil war?

Aloysius got his letter first and was most unwilling to be drawn into the affair. He was ill, as usual, and had been sent to the country house at Frascati to recuperate, which gave him time to think out his course. His confessor, St. Robert Bellarmine, took the view that he ought to go, so he was a little prepared for the order that shortly came from the General; Aloysius was to set out at once. He was gone in a quarter of an hour, first to Rome, where he had interviews with several family connections, and was provided—unwillingly—with a pair of travelling boots. Then he started for the north, in company with a Jesuit Father and a lay-brother sent to look after his health. He had been assigned a diplomatic mission in which the Emperor had failed, and his age was twenty-one.

Arrived at Mantua, Aloysius called on the Archduchess Eleanor, who had befriended him with the Emperor over his vocation. Vincent would not receive Rodolfo's brother, and in any case Aloysius must be the bearer of some sort of proposals before seeking audience with the offended Duke. So he established his headquarters in the Jesuit house at Mantua, then wrote to Rodolfo announcing a visit to Castiglione. Whether Rodolfo knew of his coming is not clear—it is possible that the visit was purposely sprung on him as a surprise to prevent his thinking out his defences; shilly-shally was one of the few things at which he excelled. As it was, he gave Aloysius a royal welcome—he could hardly do less in face of the crazy joy of the townspeople at

having him in their midst once more—and next day Donna Marta hurried from her country house to meet her son.

Promptly he was engulfed in the old life again. Every Gonzaga house was open to him save Mantua, and he had to pay a round of visits, surrounded by the luxury and deference which he loathed. Everyone was much more anxious to fête him than to get down to business; yet somehow he managed, in a few weeks, to gather the threads of the affair into his hands ready for an assault on the central citadel, the offended dignity of Duke Vincent. So to Mantua he returned, to begin his patient siege.

Duke Vincent had a presentiment that he would be unable to resist Aloysius, and he wanted to nurse his wrath. So he tried every conceivable dodge to avoid a meeting. Aloysius was kept hanging about for weeks, gracefully countering each graceful obstruction in turn. At last, by sheer persistence, he wore down the other's resistance. Vincent received him and, as had been well foreseen, capitulated. He would not consent to see Rodolfo, but he agreed to accept an apology and to submit the affair of Solferino to arbitration. The arbitrators found for Rodolfo. In about six months Aloysius successfully cracked the nut which had been too much for the Emperor. Peace was established among the Gonzagas.

That, however, did not satisfy Aloysius. He had been given a diplomatic job to do and had done it; but he had never been blind to the moral issue. Now, with Rodolfo in a good humour over the Solferino award, it was possible to tackle him about Elena Aliprandi and the more intimate domestic scandal. Whereupon Aloysius learned that Rodolfo had in fact married her, but that having kept it secret for so long he did not know how to announce it without loss of dignity. He showed himself as much a master of procrastination as Vincent, so that it took Aloysius another six months to unravel this fresh set of tangles. He moved to the Jesuit house at Milan, getting Rodolfo to come over and see him, and bit by bit straightening out the mess. In the end, he not only left Donna Marta reconciled to her daughter-in-law, but persuaded Rodolfo to a temporary regularity in the use of the

Sacraments. The whole arrangement was brittle and impermanent because all concerned, save Donna Marta, were such shoddy characters. No one else, however, built the cards into a house at all, let alone persuaded them to stay in place for quite a respectable stretch of months.

And how about Aloysius himself all this time? For such pre-occupations are no part of his inner self, which disappears under the engulfing wave of public business. We see him dive into the wave; we see him break surface again later. Only from small indications can we piece together his inward life in that underwater world.

- He went in sustained by one strong resolve: no matter where he might be, he would, as far as possible, keep up his simple mode of life. He would try to be the perfect Jesuit, down to the last detail of outward observance. This was not madness but method: if he "let up" in the least, he would give the impression that he regretted his choice. Only by keeping luxury at arm's-length could he press home the conviction that he was glad to have done with it.

Of course he overdid it. He went so far—the funniest touch of whole-hogger in his career—as to apply to his mother the Jesuit rule that forbade him to be alone with a woman. It is a measure of the anguish with which he returned to his old haunts. But it is also a measure of his confidence in his mother—she at least would be sure to understand: had she not always been his comrade in that austere inner world? It was daft of course; but without such youthful lunacies life would be savourless indeed. Yet our laughter is shot through with gratitude for the homely good sense of the lay-brother, who refused to lend himself to such quixotries. It is as if Sancho Panza voted the real knight Bayard a sufficient standard in preference to Amadis of Gaul. Thanks to the lay-brother, Donna Marta got her boy to herself, much to his contentment as well as her own.

And to Sancho Panza she owed some other concessions, such as that Aloysius accepted a couple of shirts for himself and a waistcoat apiece for them both—the lay-brother had to use a little

guile there, professing that he needed a waistcoat and could not accept one unless Aloysius did so too. His mother would also have liked to spoil him over his food, but there he held out, for practical reasons: rich fare upset him, and with so much work on hand he must keep as well as an erratic digestion would allow. Abetted by the lay-brother, however, Donna Marta got a fair proportion of her way with her son. He would hardly have been the boy she adored if he had been more compliant; it would have hurt her, more perhaps than she foresaw, had he slipped down to easier levels.

In this episode, we have the last flare-up of Aloysius's defensiveness, and through it he seems to have made a welcome discovery: no one but his mother had power to touch him now, and her he could treat as a comrade in arms. Far from being drawn by luxury, his hatred of it remained fresh and vivid. Nothing occurred to take the edge off his estimate of the world; it was as false and cruel as ever; but because he felt this, its sting for himself had been drawn. Not that he could afford to drop his guard to the ununderstanding; there was no other way to make clear his inflexible opposition to all for which they stood. But the opposition begins to take on a new character. There is a touch of comedy in the excuses he offers, as when he declined an invitation to the theatre on the grounds that it would shock his lay-brother—he, Aloysius, being of course completely hard-boiled. Attacks that he once could meet only in full armour he now puffs aside with a smile.

Aloysius never came to like the world any more than St. Francis came to like leprosy. But to those stricken with its loathsome disease he could now afford to be tender, since his own fear of its contagion was overcome. On Rodolfo especially he lavished an amount of affection which received no commensurate reward. For months he lived in what was for him a moral lazar-house, hewing its wood and drawing its water, to leave at last, himself untainted and his fear of it finally purged away.

8. *Excalibur*

Aloysius had to wait some months before receiving his longed-for summons to Rome. He spent the time in the Jesuit house at Milan, getting on with his studies, infectiously happy at being free of grandeur again as he served at table or went begging in the streets. This must not be thought of as a purely conventional humiliation, for a lady who had known him in his magnificence took an opportunity to poke fun at his shabby cassock. Aloysius had the better of that encounter, for he tackled her about her own dress and sent her away prepared to reform; but it shows that admiration was not everybody's reaction to his story. . . . He gave some offence by his habit of abstraction, for he failed to return greetings in the streets. God was everything to him, so that he found it difficult to keep his attention on anything else; when walking in the streets, unless something required him to keep attending, he very quickly lost himself in God. Indeed, Father Gagliardi, who had so alarmingly "felt his pulse" to please Ferrante, now questioned him in hopes to learn something of the secrets of unitive prayer.

It was during this waiting time that an intimation came to him one day: he must detach himself yet more, as he had but a short time to live. From now on he lived in the expectation of death, working doggedly at his books, yet feeling theology a grind when all its realities were soon to be his. When the summons to Rome came, he half-feared that he had desired it too eagerly and was ready to put it aside should it be God's will to keep him where he was. But the definite order came, and he made no secret of being glad to go, for as he said, "I have buried my dead."

He travelled with a considerable party in May 1590, through dangerous fords and famine-stricken countrysides, and settled into the old routine in Rome—this was the time when he was given the room which the next occupant dubbed "a latrine." Family affairs still pursued him, for Rodolfo was adept at brew-



ing trouble, and his mother was in need of the consolation of his letters. He managed to keep Rodolfo approximately in the straight path for the remaining months of his life; something of his own love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament penetrated even Rodolfo's shallow, worthless heart, as indeed it touched everyone who came near him. They stopped trying to prevent him thinking of holy things, so clear was it that his home was with God and his bodily presence on earth not much more than an accident. To the sick he gave himself more than ever as the love of God took possession of him and drew him into its furnace.

And there was need, for the famine of 1590 was followed by plague in 1591. The hospitals, the whole city, became a charnel-house. Donna Marta was lavish with gifts to be given through the hands of her son, but no charity could stem the tide of death. Aloysius still turned faint and sick at hospital sights and sounds, yet his joyous zeal put heart into his companions—they could not shrink where he so gaily led the way. For he chose the most horrible cases for himself. And whatever repulsion he still felt for disease he had lost all fear of death, indeed was glad to think it near. "I believe my days are few," he told St. Robert Bellarmine, "I feel such an extraordinary desire to work and to serve God. I feel it so passionately that I cannot believe God would have given it to me if He did not mean to take me away at once."

His superiors did not share this ambition. So heavy were the losses among the young Jesuits that the future of the Society was endangered and it seemed wise to hold back some of the young men from the risk of contagion. Among those forbidden to go to the hospitals was Aloysius, partly because he was so weak that on one occasion he fainted in the house. Yet as he came round, his first words were an entreaty to be allowed to return to the sick. Unwilling to quench such ardour, they gave leave for him to work in a hospital where infectious cases were not admitted.

Off he went, and finding a very sick man lifted him in his

arms to settle him more comfortably in his bed. But the man had plague—in the confusion he had been let in—and Aloysius caught it off him. This was on the 3rd of March, 1591, and as the illness increased he received the Last Sacraments. His first idea was that he would die on his birthday, the 9th of March, but instead he mended enough to live over three months more.

Being is far more difficult to chronicle than doing. The story of those last three months is a story of being—it is what Aloysius *was* that brought people to his sickroom. They came to him as bees to clover, scenting afar off that for which their souls were made. For the end of man is God, and it seemed to them that in Aloysius God had come very near to them, so that they heard Him in the voice or saw Him in the smile of His servant. Through that terrible early summer, while the plague raged and devoured, a little bit of heaven lay on a coarsely furnished bed in the Jesuits' infirmary, a flame at which men warmed their chill hearts to take a new grip of hope and so of courage. They left him with wet eyes but happy hearts, for however much they would miss him on earth they saw that he was more than half in heaven and they could not wholly wish to hold him back.

He himself did not wish to stay. The sick in the hospitals might tug at his heartstrings, but God outweighed even that. Before his illness he had warned his mother that his time would be short, and the two letters he sent her from his sick-bed offer no other consolation than the hope of heaven: "I find joy in thinking that God our Lord wishes to give me a more perfect health than what the doctors can give, and so things are going very cheerfully for me, with the hope of being called by God our Lord in a few months from the land of the dead to that of the living and from the society of the men of the earth to that of the angels and the saints of heaven, and in fine from the sight of these earthly and transitory things to the vision and contemplation of God who has all good things. This can too be a cause of comfort to Your Most Illustrious Ladyship, because you love me and wish me well."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Martindale, p. 224.

His last letter, written ten days before his death, must be quoted in full:

“Most Illustrious and most honoured Mother in our Lord, the Peace of Christ.

“May the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit be always with Your Most Illustrious Ladyship. Your Ladyship’s letter found me still living in this world of death but I am very soon going to praise God for ever in the land of the living. I thought by now to have made already that last passage, but, the violence of the fever (as I told you in my last letter) abated in its main course and fierceness, and that has brought me quietly to the glorious feast of the Ascension. Since then, because of a great concentration of catarrh in my chest, it has increased, so that quite gradually I am on my way to the dear and sweet embrace of the Heavenly Father, on whose breast I hope to be able to rest, in security, and for ever. And so the various pieces of news that have come from various quarters about me, all agree, as I have also written to my Lord Marquis [Rodolfo]. Now if charity, as St. Paul says, makes us weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who are joyful, great must be the joy of Your Ladyship, Lady Mother, for the grace that God does you in my person, God our Lord leading me to the true joy and assuring me that I shall no more have to lose it. I confess to Your Most Illustrious Ladyship that I am bewildered and lose myself at the thought of the divine goodness, a sea without shore and fathomless, of God who calls me to an eternal rest after such short and tiny labours—summons and calls me to heaven, to that supreme Good that I sought so negligently, and promises me the fruit of those tears I sowed so sparingly. Take care, take care, dear Mother, to do no injury to that infinite Goodness, as it would be, without doubt, to grieve for, as dead, one who must now live before God to help you by his prayers far more than he could do on earth. Not long will last that separation: there we shall see one another again and be happy without ever growing tired, united together with our Redeemer, praising Him with all our

strength, and singing for ever His mercies. I do not at all doubt that, leaving aside all that the reasoning of human nature says, we shall easily open the door to faith and to that simple and pure obedience to which we are held by God, offering Him freely and promptly that which is His, and all the more willingly the dearer to you is the thing that He takes from you, believing firmly that what God does, is all of it well done, taking away what He first had given us, and for no other reason than to put it in a safe and sure place, and to give to it what we all desire for ourselves. I have said all this for no other reason than to satisfy the desire I have that Your Most Illustrious Ladyship and all my family may receive this my departure as a dear gift, and that you may accompany me and help me with your Mother's blessing to pass this gulf and reach the shore of all my hopes. I have done it with the better will because I have nothing else left with which to give you some little proof of the love and filial reverence that I owe you. I end by asking once more very humbly for your blessing. From Rome, June 10th, 1591. Your Most Illustrious Ladyship's most obedient son in Christ, Aluigi Gonzaga."<sup>1</sup>

The most astonishing thing in this letter is the confidence of being understood. Not many sons could trust their mothers to meet them on a plane like this; it is the "with your shield or on it" raised to the supernatural level and reversed: the boy on the shield sends his dying salute to the mother who gave him his spirit—perhaps the most profound of all human communions.

A few days later came the Feast of Corpus Christi. He had already been told by the doctors that he could not recover—"Do you know the good news I have had?" he asked a visitor. "Say the *Te Deum* with me"—but now he knew the day of his release: he would die on the octave day of the Feast. They did not believe him, for he seemed no weaker than before, and as the octave came round even seemed rather better. So the first time he asked for Viaticum they refused; but later in the day they yielded, and after his thanksgiving his special friends dropped in one by one to say good-bye. The Provincial looked in too. "We are off,

<sup>1</sup> Martindale, pp. 225-7.

Father Provincial," Aloysius greeted him. "Off? Where?"—"To heaven, if my sins do not stop me"—his confessor had held out the hope that he might enter heaven without passing through purgatory, and it had thrown him into ecstasy. "Hark at this young man," whispered the Provincial, "he talks of going to heaven as we should talk of going to Frascati" (the country house).

Not until ten o'clock at night did anyone but himself feel sure that he would die that day. They had been just impressed enough to leave watchers for the night, who had said the Prayers for the Departing Soul at his request. Towards ten o'clock, however, his bedsores became so painful that he asked to be lifted. But on going to him the watchers knew they must not touch him or they would shake the life out of him, so they said gently, "Christ died nailed." Light came into his face at the words, for there indeed had been the light of his whole life. When they put a crucifix into his hands, he gazed long at it, then, with the name of Jesus on his lips, he died.

The letters to Donna Marta show how convinced everyone was that Aloysius was a Saint, and it was to him she looked for help in the tragic years ahead. Two years later Rodolfo was murdered, excommunicate, having been charged with forging Papal coinage. The peasants seized the chance to revolt; they captured and sacked the castle of Castiglione, so that Francesco, the next heir, spent years in restoring order. After various adventures, Donna Marta tried to take refuge at Solferino, but was captured with one of her younger sons, a boy of fifteen, the peasants threatening death if she refused to order the gates of the castle to be opened. They shot the boy before her eyes, then, as she still would not give the order, stabbed her and left her for dead. Townspeople carried her into their house to die—this was in 1597—but Aloysius appeared to her "surrounded by a globe of most vivid light," as she told Cepari, smiled at her without speaking, and restored her to life.

Such are the mysteries of God's training, for humanly speaking she had nothing left for which to live. "What God does, is all

of it well done," her boy had written to her; and if God's last demand on her was the hard one of a longer life, He softened it by making Aloysius the messenger of His most holy will. The Gonzaga greatness tottered about her, subsiding if not into ruins at least into something much smaller than it had been. But she meekly lived on, murmuring—who can doubt it?—sentences from his letters: "Not long will last that separation: there we shall see one another again and be happy without ever growing tired, united together with our Redeemer, praising Him with all our strength, and for ever singing His mercies." And the future held one great joy for her; she lived to see Aloysius's picture publicly venerated in the parish church of Castiglione, amid the delirious joy of the people.

For Aloysius in heaven had remembered his friends, as indeed he had promised: "Be sure I shall not forget you," he had said to one of them, "I have loved you on earth, but how much better shall I love you there where charity is made perfect." His nurse, his faithful manservant, many others high and low from all classes of society received through him the help which God loves to dispense through His friends. But above all, to storm-tossed youth he has proved a sure refuge, being himself the guarantee that there is no tempest too elemental to heed Christ's "Peace, be still." For He who could walk on the waters of the Gonzaga temperament, amid the bright lures of the Medici court, can be trusted to steer any boat through the worst weather in the world.

Time is ever at war with Hope, spreading its dimming veil over the Life and Death of Christ. We need the lived Gospel of the Saints to freshen the colours of the ancient story and so restore to Hope its pristine power. We drift so easily into thinking that it was all very well for people long ago; they were more likely material for grace, living in simpler times and being more simple themselves. God might be able to help them, but we cannot expect Him to reach to the last loop and kink of our modern complexities.

No one was ever less likely material for grace than Aloysius

Gonzaga, and few have had so complex a tangle to unravel. He stands at the headwaters of the modern world, like Shakespeare, one of the first exponents of the many-sided modern mood. And looking down the river of events that flows from him to us—not least the consequences of that *Realpolitik* which he refused to touch—he calls to us the ancient assurance: “Let no temptation take hold on you, but such as is human. And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it. . . .”<sup>1</sup> On the lips of Machiavelli’s Prince we feel anew the force of the promises of God.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 13.

## GRANDDAUGHTER OF CONQUISTADORES

ST. ROSE OF LIMA, 1586-1617

### 1. *The Stage is Set*

A YOUNG man came out of a rambling colonial house and began to cross the rambling colonial garden. Suddenly he stopped dead. His favourite sister, a Dominican tertiary, was standing among the roses, as she had good right to do, for she was a green-fingered gardener whose blooms commanded good prices in a city of flower connoisseurs. But she was not gardening, not even tying up her wares for market. She was throwing roses into the air and—this was what held young Ferdinand spellbound—they did not come down again. They stayed up in the air, and he watched with popping eyes while with deft flicks of her wrist (she was very neatly made) she tossed the flowers into a great glowing Cross. . . .

Make what you like of this story. It rests on the sworn testimony of Ferdinand himself; the incident is too long for a hallucination; he was sober and in good health, and his head was full of other things; and it is not the sort of fancy a young man weaves about even a favourite sister. It is told here because it perfectly symbolizes the quality of Rose de Flores' life, its air of perpetual youth, and a youth whose spirit and grace require for background a sunny garden full of bright flowers and brighter birds. This is the picture of her which time has printed on the memories of men—not the incident of the flowery Cross, but a vision of a young girl in the zenith of her radiance, delicate as a rose in her tints, moving among her flowers as daintily as a humming-bird. That Rose's garden was an Eden where man and beast met on friendly terms does not surprise. But it comes as a shock that this exquisite child should also be one of the most penitential Saints in the calendar.

Rose de Flores was everything that the most exacting devourer



of romance could desire. She was pretty. She was witty. She knew exactly what she wanted and had an excellent idea of how to get her own way. She invented her own songs and sang them to her own tunes. Her command of the resourceful Spanish tongue made her an enchanting companion, all the more as she could amuse without hurting—and bored Lima wanted amusement too badly to be always so choice. Rose, with all her wit, was as tender as she was shrewd. She knew her mind so well that all living things fell in with her wishes—it gives us no surprise to hear that trees and flowers bowed to her, savage beasts surrendered to her gentleness, mosquitoes sang office with her, butterflies brought her messages and birds joined in her prayers. What startles us into incredulity is not the fairy princess element in her story; it is the shattering of the fairy conventions. For Beauty deliberately to choose the role of Cinderella brings us to earth with a bump. Only one Prince could content her, and for His sake she shut herself up in her bower and fenced it about with thorns. Yet when at last He came for her, it was that she might live happily ever after.

Just when Rose's parents came to the New World is not known, whether they were born there or whether they formed part of the stream of respectable immigrants that followed on the heels of the Conquistadores. They certainly belonged to this respectable element, a family of decayed gentlefolk of the kind that Scotland and Spain know how to respect while some other countries are quick to deride. Perhaps they did a little hold on to the edge of wealthier circles, all the more severely well-bred because the hold was a shade precarious. Decorum, at least on the surface, marked this third colonial generation in New Spain. By the time of our Saint's birth, Lima was trying to forget its dishevelled beginnings. It had a very normal Church and official life and the beginnings of an intellectual life; if it still had to import its learned from Spain it liked to think itself able to appreciate them. And it jealously guarded the proprieties, especially where young girls were concerned. Perhaps social distinctions were a little fainter than in the mother country. But

it was in a Lima resolutely Spanish and civilized that Rose de Flores saw the light.

And resolution was needed. The whites were still a tiny handful among sullen savages by no means forgetful of their ancient freedom. Lima's chief treasure was a statue of Our Lady, which had saved the city in an Indian rising, converting the rebels to the Faith. This detail more than any other gives the atmosphere of Liman life, a religion vigorous enough to hold its own among the wild growths of barbarism, but not untouched by barbarian crudeness. Nor was warfare the only way in which the Indian population made its presence felt. Paganism was still a potent force, a paganism shorn of its more gracious elements, appealing to jaded folk whose prevalent mood was boredom. The heathenry whose temper seeped into the little citadels of the whites was a heathenry whose deeds were clothed in darkness.

And this was chiefly the fault of the whites. The methods of the Conquistadores had hardly endeared the Christian religion to the Indians; and there had also been a certain amount of forced conversion. The religious Orders had strenuously resisted their countrymen on both issues, but with only partial success. They had indeed secured important improvements in the treatment of the Indians, especially after criminals from Spanish jails were replaced by a better type of settler. This criminal element was the chief cause of the horrors associated with the early Spanish conquests; the armies of more than one Conquistadore had consisted largely of jailbirds. That phase had passed, but unluckily the influence of the jailbirds was deeply stamped on the colonial traditions. By the time of the birth of St. Rose, the tone of Spanish-American life was still too much marked by that wave of greed which had engulfed the first Spanish settlements. In this atmosphere, the Friars had not yet won for the Indians their full human rights, though they had made considerable progress; it can fairly be said that the survival of the South American aborigines is their work. As to converting—where the task had been left to the Friars, unhampered by officials and men on the make, it had produced genuine results.

The situation was still tangled with greed, violence and fear. But some tangles had been straightened out; it was now common knowledge that maltreatment of native races came under the ban of the Church; old subterfuges, such as that the Indians were not really human, had been specifically condemned from Rome. Those who continued these evil practices knew themselves under a moral ban. Catholic principles of human dignity were slowly winning recognition in deed as well as in word.

Apart from the first phase of untrammelled violence, the story of native races in South America is less painful than the similar story in other continents.<sup>1</sup> The chief reason for this is that the South American reformer was able to appeal to a moral authority which sinners recognized even when they disobeyed. Elsewhere, exploiters could always entangle the reformer in a discussion of principles, and so shelve the issue indefinitely. The Friars could assume a body of moral principles admitted as binding even by the exploiters, and so could skip discussion and get to action. By hammering away at the teaching of the Church, they kept exploiters in mind of the truth that they were living under the Church's ban. The issue was not decided in one day—greed is probably the most powerful motive which can rule the human mind. But after the first jailbird swarm was a little checked, things steadily improved. The better element that came later from Spain often found itself in an uncomfortable position between established traditions of native management and the impassioned preaching of the Friars. They had come with imaginations full of gold mines, and would hardly have been

<sup>1</sup> Canada is the one exception. There the French Government kept control of the first settlers, and picked their quality, with more success than the Spanish Government had done. As a result, French colonial policy was just and merciful from the start, and is perhaps the one bit of colonization which Europeans can contemplate without a blush. The British Government continued the Indian policy of Catholic France, so that Canada never knew the evils which South America had to correct and which some other territories long considered it unnecessary to correct.

human if they had wanted to hear quite so much about hell. In the main they compromised. They did not give up what was virtually a system of disguised slavery (sometimes very thinly disguised); but they operated it with increasing humanity. A further rise in the spiritual tide and the boat of reform might float over that bar as well.

And that is just what Rose de Flores contributed. The general effect of her life was a marked rise in the spiritual tone of the whole South American continent. In that better atmosphere the religious Orders were able to make themselves felt in a new way. Consciences were more sensitive, greed less blinding. If by the nineteenth century South America was the only region colonized by whites where the native life continued in its ancestral pattern, much of the credit goes to this delicately formed young girl.

All of this makes her methods more remarkable. Rose took no part in public life; her whole career is a career of hiddenness and secret penance. Her direct work for the Indians was limited to rescuing derelict Indian women, apparently without protest against the system which had brought them to that pass. What she thought of the system she expressed, not in protest but in penance. The two great motives of her penances were the conversion of the heathen and the conversion of sinners—and she knew something of the South American brands of both. Like several other women Saints of strong apostolic bent, Rose turned by instinct to penance as the mode of her apostolate. Indeed, one can hardly say that she was concerned with systems and laws at all, for penance took hold of her when she was far too young to be able to realize that there could be a system other than the one she had always known. Years before she was capable of social criticism God took possession of her; the impulses that overmastered her represent not her judgement but His.

Indeed, as her critical judgement awoke, it turned first to something lying much closer to her hand—the empty frivolity which was all that colonial life offered to women of the sheltered

classes. The situation was in many ways like that in India to-day. The men were all engaged on important public work or in business; the women's function was little more than to be pleasant to look at for a change. There never has been a time when women of character and intelligence have contentedly acquiesced in that. The problem is always present, but it becomes more acute in artificial societies—and colonial society is highly artificial. Anyone who knows anything of station life in India knows how real this problem is. In one sense the women's life is one of extra hardship; in another of subhuman irresponsibility. What the climate lays upon them from one side is more than taken off them from another. The result is all but complete divorce from reality. Whether accepted or rebelled against, the vacuum remains, and in its dismal void gossip and etiquette attain fantastic growths. And so does flirtation.

There was another aspect of life in the tropics which is constantly present in Rose's story—temper. The jokes about "Indian liver" and peppery colonels will help us here, save that where climate works on a Southern rather than a Northern temperament the results are even more flaming. Rose moved in a world where tempers were volcanic, though the volcanoes had long dormant spells. It was too hot to be angry always, or often. Better to flop, to drift through the sticky day with as little movement or emotion as possible. . . . But woe betide anyone who prodded those limp figures! He was apt to inspire rather more exertion than he wanted. The tempo of life was a syncope of inertia and violent rage. But its keynote was boredom.

No wonder the Limans selected Rose's even temper and hardworking habits as the chief miracles of her life.

## 2. *Childhood*

Rose de Flores was born on the 20th of April, 1586, one of the eleven children of Gaspar and Maria de Flores, poor Spanish gentlefolk of Lima in Peru. Nowhere is it stated where she came in the family, but apparently somewhere in the middle. And

none of the other children take clear shape in the narrative, except Ferdinand, a year older than herself and her favourite and playfellow.

The baby was baptized Isabel, after her godmother and aunt, her mother's sister, Isabel de Herrera. When she was three months old her mother, stooping over the cradle, saw something in her face which made her change the name to Rose. This greatly annoyed the godmother, and for several years the child was a bone of contention between them, scolded and slapped whichever name she answered to. It was a confusing situation for a child, but Rose did her puzzled best to please both her elders, for she had from the first a strong sense of duty. No one in the house seems to have had the modicum of common sense needed to end such pig-headed stupidity, and at last the quarrel had to be settled by the Archbishop of Lima, who confirmed the little girl by the name of Rose.

She was no more robust than other tropical babies—indeed she seems to have been in and out of the doctors' hands most of her life. Many of her troubles came from the barbaric medicine of the period, or else from her mother's amateur doctoring. When she was four, a powder used for a scalp affection produced ulcers all over her head; yet she made no complaint. Her mother had no idea of what had happened until she removed the bandage and saw for herself. Another time, a nail from a crushed finger had to be pulled out; Rose not only endured without a cry, she actually smiled at the agitated grown-ups, to persuade them that it did not hurt so very much. She had always a great idea of sparing her mother the spectacle of her own pains, and her feats of endurance were astonishing in a tiny child. Taught thus by love, she early developed unusual powers of self-control.

Yet she was a merry little creature, a great favourite with other children, in demand at all their games and undertakings. This was in part because she never stood out for her own way. But she also had a vein of originality which makes it a safe guess that she was resourceful at play, a promoter of good times as well

as a shock-absorber of tempers and selfishness. The details of her childhood were gathered from the point of view of her canonization; and so, though accurate, are a trifle one-sided. We have to draw on what we know of her mature character, as well as on the unchanging world of childhood, to fill in the somewhat conventional outlines.

Not that Rose was the conventional "good child" of the story-books—she would never have been that. Her natural type was that of the wilful little beauty, twisting everyone round her finger by a clever use of her baby charms—it is amazing how early a certain type of little girl learns to queen it by trading on her attractions. Rose knew all about twisting people round her finger. She did it again and again, from her ignorant Peruvian maidservant, who became her chief ally in her penances, to the Archbishop of Lima and his commission of learned theologians. But in her it coexisted with other factors, of conscience, insight and choice, which made themselves felt while her arena was still the world of nursery games and squabbles.

Instead of basking in her popularity, or working it for all it was worth, Rose seized every chance to slip away into corners of the house and garden. She had little privacy, for she slept with her mother and spent her days among a flock of lively youngsters. Yet solitude called her as much as if she had been the child of some upland farm. Instinctively she tried to keep it secret. But she could not entirely hide what she was doing. People noticed that she often had her rosary in her hand, or stood for minutes before a picture of the thorn-crowned Christ, or was simply wrapped in her own thoughts in some unfrequented nook. And Rose did think—"I think about God, about the shortness of life, about eternity—in a word, *I think*," as a modern child explained to a teacher unable to believe that such a small person had anything in her head but games and holidays.<sup>1</sup> When the "drift of pinions" beat at her windows, Rose pressed her ear to the shutters and listened hard. And by degrees the voices of eternity grew more insistent than those of time. God

<sup>1</sup> St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

made Himself known to her, a Reality so overwhelming that by its side her ordinary world looked only half-alive.

It was brotherly teasing that precipitated a crisis. When Rose was about six, she was romping one day with Ferdinand, and that beloved boy threw mud on her hair. Rose was ruffled; she disliked dirt. Seeing her put out, Ferdinand joyously baited her further. Screwing his face into an imitation of some half-understood preacher, he dismally intoned: "My dear sister, do not be angry at this accident, for the curled ringlets of girls are hellish cords which bind the hearts of men, and miserably draw them into eternal flames."

Rose escaped into the house to tidy, a whole new vista dancing before her startled mind. That the world is not real as God is real she already knew. Now she saw its evil. Sin, hitherto little more than a word, became suddenly actual and horrible. It was as if she saw the world for a moment through God's eyes, saw on the one side Infinite Love, on the other its rejection by human insolence and greed. And Rose's little heart sided passionately with God. She must be wholly God's, and if her hair got in the way, so much the worse for her hair! At that age she can hardly have heard Christ's saying about cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye, but she acted on it by instinct. Snatching up a pair of scissors she cut off her glorious golden hair. Then, gathering up the shining spoils, she offered them to Our Lord.

And there, I think, Rose's childhood ends. She had taken her side in the World Debate, taken it with the ardour, even fierceness, of her tropical nature. Besides, she had passed out from the age of innocence, the age, that is, when innocence is a sufficient shield because it is a sufficient explanation. There is a bigger rift in the world than the rift between the half-real and the Wholly Real; that is simply a step in a ladder. But the rift of good and evil is not a step, it is a flaw. To see sin as Rose saw it, a very abyss of horror, hatred flung in the face of love, is to see life in its true colours, its true perspective. And no one can do that and remain a child.

It is after this crisis that her penances begin. They begin



childishly enough with experiments in fasting or in making her bed uncomfortable, or in various devices for giving her food a nasty taste. Her practices grew with her growth. What did not change is her motive. From the first, Rose had an urge, deep and resistless, to make up to God in some way for the scorn of His love by men. Love was despised, and he who would cherish love must seek it in the heart of man's scorn, on the hill called Calvary. From now on, Rose's face is set more and more towards the Cross.

So she identified herself, finally and irrevocably, with the strong currents of that "inner chamber" which had so mysteriously taken possession of her, little as they consorted with her natural temperament. They squared even worse with her outward circumstances, which combined with her temperament to push her along a very different road. For about fourteen years Rose struggled amid hidden currents and undertows before she won the right to shape her course. Her inner and her outer world were at cross purposes, so that she was torn between love of God and love of her family, hard put to it to do what was right in two directions at once. How to obey God and also her mother was her especial puzzle. For as the years passed, the focus of her difficulties became more and more her mother.

### 3. *Mother and Daughter*

Maria de Flores was not a bad sort of woman. Ill health made her temper uncertain; she was unmethodical and spasmodic in her ways, anything but a model of regularity and even-handedness. But she was devoted to her children and particularly devoted to Rose. And Rose on her side was devoted to her, unresentfully accepting the blame when her mother found her a nuisance, trying all sorts of little loving ways to spare her bother. She saw so little of really equable tempers that her mother's irritability probably appeared to her completely natural, to be perhaps not justified but certainly compassionated on account of her health.

As her mind developed, however, she was forced to become aware of another element—her mother's affection owed much to an unfortunate stimulus. Maria de Flores more or less openly looked on Rose's beauty as a financial asset to the whole family, and the object of her care was to preserve the asset intact. Mixed with her pride as mother of the loveliest girl in Lima was a strong dash of maternal calculation. What a fine thing for the boys to have their sister married to some prominent man and able to pull strings on their behalf! And it was perfectly feasible. Given good birth, even a portionless girl could make a brilliant match if she was outstandingly attractive. And Rose was much more than a delight to the eyes. She was a good, dependable girl, well trained in the house and wittily entertaining in company. What mother-in-law could ask more? And it was the mothers who made up the matches in Lima. Maria saw to it that the mothers of eligible sons had ample opportunity to survey her eligible daughter.

The situation between Florence Nightingale and her mother affords a parallel, though Mrs. Nightingale had not the excuse of poverty for her matrimonial schemes. Herself married to a wealthy idealist of the middle classes, she set her heart upon marrying her girls into the aristocracy, and the scheme broke down on nothing but Florence's desire for "significant work." Maria de Flores was less of a snob—if you prefer, had less need to be, for she had the entry by birth into the circle where she sought a mate for her daughter. But in each case the mother saw in the daughter only an eminently marriageable young woman, whereas the girl's life moved in a world of realities closed to the mother. Hence the clash.

In each case, too, the girl's problem was complicated by a strong sense of filial duty. Neither Florence Nightingale nor Rose de Flores assumed the right to "live her own life." Each had to combine an overmastering inner urge with a recognized outward duty, fully accepted as of obligation. Florence Nightingale, it will be remembered, acquired her training in snatches as the continental tour brought her within reach of

Sisters of Charity or Lutheran deaconesses doing the "significant work" for which she craved. She nearly became a Catholic, drawn by "the wonderful life which the Catholic Church opens to women in the religious Orders." And it was largely regard for her mother that prevented her change of religion. Parental claims have grown so weak that it is well to remind ourselves of the lengths to which they can go.

Rose's problem, as compared with Florence's, was intensified in two ways. She had to work out her solution entirely at home, where she lived far more immediately under her mother's eye than Florence Nightingale ever did. Not for her the escape for a few weeks to friends willing to connive at her desire for training. She never hoodwinked her mother, but step by step won her consent. And, secondly, Rose had a far stiffer standard of what was due to her mother, whom she put in the place not only of a parent but of a religious superior. The danger of an immensely strong inward call is conceit; Rose armed herself against this by seeing in her mother's commands the commands of God. She never held herself free to follow her inner light until her mother's permission had been won.

At the same time, Rose had one enormous advantage over Florence Nightingale—she could count on a public opinion in her favour once her case was made out. And her parents would respect the principles on which that case rested. Florence Nightingale, by contrast, lived in a world that kept no room for exceptional action on the part of well-bred young women. There were only two alternatives for a girl of the protected classes, to marry, or to drag on at home a failure. It was Florence herself who opened a third alternative, opened it in the face of hostility so intense that she used up much of her marvellous energy in merely overcoming it. This is the probable reason for her breakdown in later life; the energy needed to develop her work had been frittered away on winning the right to work. No such wasteful struggle lay before Rose. Her world conceded, in principle, that God might call anybody, girl as much as boy, high-born lady as much as child of the people, to the task of

exceptional suffering for His sake. Let her but prove that she had received such a call and her world would concede her the right to follow it. And her parents, though they would unhesitatingly have broken any ordinary opposition, would hesitate to break a genuine religious vocation.

The dangers of her position were selfwill and conceit; her temptations sprang straight out of her strength of character and her strength of conviction. She could have marred the whole work of God in her by forcing her will upon her parents in the wrong way. The task set her was to win them; not to override their freewill but convince their judgement. She must not get her way simply by making a nuisance of herself—an art in which she could easily have excelled. She must get God's way by making clear that it was God's—by surrendering, that is, her own will whenever it was simply hers. That is the root of the extraordinary obedience which she rendered her mother over a period of years.

She could hardly have found and held such a tricky course without help. And the help given her was the life of another Saint. The de Flores household was as poor in books as in everything else, but it did own one, a life of St. Catherine of Siena: the Dominicans had inspired Lima with a special veneration for their great young Saint. Rose loved what she had heard of St. Catherine and longed to read the whole book. But her mother could not be bothered to teach her regularly, and after a few attempts broke off her reading lessons when the child was four and a half. Rose said nothing of her disappointment; she accepted the blame for being a nuisance to her darling mother and taking up her time when she was busy. Perhaps one of the stories told her had been how God had taught St. Catherine to read when she was nineteen years old. Nineteen or four, what was that to God? Rose made her simple request, and when it was granted ran to her mother with the book, to show her that now she could read *and* write, "so that you might not have the trouble."

Thus Rose gained access to the full story of her "mistress,"

as she called St. Catherine of Siena, a story in which she found much guidance for herself. She showed however the true instinct of discipleship in leaving on one side all that did not concern her; there is nothing in her story parallel to the public activities of St. Catherine. But she pounced on what did concern her—how to obey God and at the same time a mother who had no sympathy with the call from God. Rose learned from her book to obey her mother meticulously and cheerfully in all that did not touch the inward call, and only to follow the call as, step by step, she could win her mother's consent. It was a strenuous programme, astonishing at any time of life, but doubly astonishing during the intolerant years of adolescence. A girl as intelligent as Rose was bound to "see through" her mother with the clear-sightedness of youth unsoftened by experience. If she handled the situation with a wisdom beyond her years, its source must be sought in her prayers. Her baby impulse to meditation had long since flowered into a high degree of unitive prayer. Rose had advanced far along the Mystic Way while her mother was planning her wordly advancement.

The tellable parts of Rose's story are the points at which she stood out against her mother. But that means seeing them out of perspective. Maria de Flores had good reason to regard Rose as an exceptionally obedient child, who needed watching, not to see that she did as she was told but for fear she overdid. This to her mother was the normal Rose, merrily doing as she was bid, apparently without a wish of her own apart from her mother's will. But this submissiveness only made her occasional stands more irritating as well as more impressive. Maria de Flores learned that there was always principle behind Rose's rare oppositions, and this forced from her a sometimes unwilling respect. Sooner or later Rose always had to be taken seriously. She was so free from caprice that caprice was shamefaced in her presence. In the end, she had to be met on her chosen ground of principle.

The first fuss was about fasting. Like most of her practices this has a continuous history almost from babyhood, for at four

years old she gave up fruit, always handing over her share to the other children. When she was six, she took to fasting three days a week on stale bread and tepid water, particularly denying herself the refreshment of a cold drink. Soon after her First Communion, at what age is not recorded, she had her first vision of Our Lord—and He asked her to fast in His honour, promising that He Himself would be the support of her life. (Later, she several times lived for days on end with no other food than the Sacred Host.) In response to this vision, Rose vowed never again to touch meat, unless forced to it under obedience.

That Maria de Flores disapproved is only natural—she was terrified of Rose losing her looks. Besides, she wanted, sensibly enough, to find out whether she was dealing with a real spiritual inspiration or a bit of schoolgirl nonsense. (This is the sort of point at which Rose had such a pull over Florence Nightingale: her world recognized, in theory, the principles of her chosen life; her fight was solely for the right to practise.) But when forced to eat meat she became ill, and her mother gave way. And during a serious illness, when she was about fifteen, the doctor also prescribed meat, to find to his astonishment that it brought on not only sickness but acute pain. She had to be allowed to return to her diet of bread and water, and when she was about again she persuaded the maidservant to serve her with unpalatable scraps even at the family dinner.

The next fuss was her sleeping arrangements. Rose shared her mother's bed, so Maria had reasons for objecting to pieces of wood under the sheet. When she forbade these, Rose slipped out of bed and spent the night on the floor. Forbidden to do this, she turned back the mattress and lay on the bed itself, taking great care not to disturb her mother. Foiled at every point, Maria grudgingly let her sleep alone, and Rose made for herself the bed which was to be her chief instrument of penance for the rest of her life. It was a box of rough wood; instead of a mattress there were pieces of wood and bits of broken crockery with the sharp edges uppermost; while for a pillow she had a bolster-case filled with wood. Maria, characteristically, objected

to the bolster on the grounds that it would injure Rose's face and told her to fill the case with wool. Rose did so, packing the wool so tight that the bolster was as hard as a board. Maria gave in over that too, and in the end Rose settled on a pillow of rough stone, after experimenting with bricks.

But the big fight came when Rose was old enough to be introduced into society. Feeling that the whole family fortune depended on her *début*, Maria taxed all her resources to set her daughter off to advantage. She provided her with pretty clothes, ornaments and cosmetics. Rose weeded out the one thing that seemed to her, if not absolutely wrong, at least more than she could bear: with the gentlest tact she begged to be let off the cosmetics—they were not, she said, compatible with Christian modesty. Maria yielded the point. After all, Rose's complexion needed no assistance; girls who made up would serve as a foil to her exquisite tints. And in any case the ornaments and pretty clothes remained—Maria had no inkling of how Rose intended to deal with those. She discovered it one day when it became necessary to send for a surgeon to remove a needle from her daughter's head. Whenever she had to dress up to go out Rose made a practice of doing something to secure pain until she came home again. Given a garland to wear, she had driven a needle so deep into her scalp that she could not get it out again. Apparently this was the only time she was caught out; so perfect was her self-command that her mother had no other occasion to suspect what was going on.

We shall do Rose a great injustice if we slur over the element of struggle in all this. It is true that she was drawn by an all but irresistible pull from the side of God. But this did not neutralize the ordinary pulls natural to her age; if anything, it intensified them by making them so much more noticeable. Rose knew she was pretty and that the clothes given her were pretty. She enjoyed doing what she did well—talking entertainingly in company. Yet if she let herself go to these pulls she would, she knew, weaken and at last lose the other pull. God would fade; He, the All-real, would disappear behind the mists of the half-

real. At the same time, it was a duty to obey her mother. Rose could not cope with the situation in what is undoubtedly the easiest way, by making a clean break with all that could draw her from God. She had an infinitely harder task—to remain true to the Love which had chosen her in the midst of all that most distracted her from Him. She therefore set herself, deliberately, to neutralize her pleasure in her pretty clothes by combining the wearing with some kind of sharp pain. Once when she weakened she was reminded, sternly enough, of the claims of her Love. Having allowed herself more than usual pleasure in wearing a pair of scented gloves, to her surprise the gloves began to burn her hands so that she was forced to peel them off. That night in a dream she saw them surrounded by the fires of hell. She realized that God was claiming from her an absolute fidelity to Himself, and returned with fresh zeal to her devices for counteracting her pleasure in her pretty things.

Rose did much more than endure these penances with silent fortitude. Her mother required her to talk in company, and her talk was so charming that hostesses laid themselves out to draw her out. Lima had few amusements and Rose de Flores soon ranked high among them. She could be witty without saying one unkind word, a form of entertainment rare at any place or time. Besides, she had a poetical vein in her, and though her songs belong to a later period, she showed a range of fancy much to the taste of the good ladies of Lima. Quite a number apparently considered her seriously as a prospective daughter-in-law.

And so the crisis came. An offer was made for Rose on behalf of an exceedingly wealthy family of good character, an establishment such as her mother had dreamed but perhaps had hardly dared to hope. How old she was is not stated, perhaps sixteen or seventeen. Now, it is a tribute to Rose that her parents found it necessary to approach her with some care. They evidently gave considerable thought to the matter and tackled her at last on the side of her affections and conscience. Not her affection for the young man; no one, Rose as little as any of them, treated that as of any importance; affection was expected



to spring up where there was good character and a sufficient degree of personal attractiveness. The whole case was put to Rose in terms of the advantage to her brothers and sisters. Her affection for them was skilfully worked upon, and her sense of duty. If she loved them—and she did—surely she would recognize it as her duty to accept an offer which would so greatly brighten the prospects for them all.

Rose refused the offer; she had taken a vow of virginity at the age of five, as a result of reading the life of St. Catherine. Her parents obviously expected some resistance—else why all this circumspection? She had first to listen to endless affectionate reproaches, which need not greatly surprise. But when these failed reproaches turned to abuse—to get the atmosphere, look up what old Capulet said to Juliet when she refused to marry Paris; fathers were not mealy-mouthed in Shakespeare's day. And the de Flores parents did not stop at words; they went on to blows. They told the other children of Rose's disgraceful selfishness; even Ferdinand sided against her. Her gentleness only exasperated them; anyone who spoke so quietly ought to be easy to persuade. Yet in the end her gentle firmness won, that and her obvious grief at having to oppose their wishes. Rose took all the blame for the wretched business, though in fact it was her mother's contriving. But we shall wrong her unless we realize that she was torn in two. She could not—*could* not—give her heart to another than God. But it hurt her dreadfully to have to withhold from her brothers the family asset of her beauty—she would gladly have given her life for them, but she could not give them this. Besides, her good sense told her that she owed *something* to her family, and as we shall see, she retained a very sensitive feeling of obligation at this point.

For of course her parents gave in. Everyone always did give in to Rose in the end. Partly, she had conscience and reason on her side, powerful allies that can wear down most opposition. She had too a will long exercised in self-control. He who can rule himself can generally, in the long run, impose his view on

those who are the sport of their capricious desires. Rose was standing for principles admitted by the whole society to which she belonged—principles of love and sacrifice often swamped under human passion and waywardness, yet always reappearing, like some wave-swept rock outlasting all submerging storms.

And yet, there is another factor. Rose certainly won by the exercise of the basic human faculties, reason, will and conscience. But she exercised them in a typically feminine way. She “came over” people rather than exactly convinced them; they had surrendered before they quite knew why. Not that she failed to give solid reasons for what she did—one of the things that made her formidable was her power of sound thinking. But it was not that, or not that alone, which so regularly gave her the victory. One feels in Rose a kind of femininity raised to the *n*th degree, and then supernaturalized. There is an engaging touch of the minx in her spirituality, even at its most heroic. It was a minxdom dyed with all the colours of heaven, yet never transcended, never left behind as something done with and outworn.

That is the queerest thing in Rose’s life. In spite of her innocence, the Saint she most recalls is the Magdalen. The great women saints have had in supreme degree the feminine capacity for loving against all hope and all odds; that is why so many expiatory Saints have been innocent young girls. But Rose de Flores, like the Magdalen, was feminine in the other, less approved, way, the way that appeals less to moralists than to poets: she was ensnaring. If by choice she was the Valiant Woman, she could have been “the woman that catcheth the precious soul of a man.”<sup>1</sup> The warning that reached her through her brother’s teasing was absolutely to the point; Rose could have snared men with her hair.

This gift—for it is a gift—Rose did not throw away or bury in a napkin or otherwise return unused to God. She purified it, of course, as all the gifts of our sin-stained nature have to be purified if they are to be fit for God’s service. And then she traded with it as a legacy from Him. Not consciously indeed—for this

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs vi. 26.

power of fascination is, even at the natural level, unconscious so long as it is innocent; and this unconsciousness remains at the supernatural level. Rose's conscious fight was to bring into captivity to the obedience of Christ her whole nature, wherever she could see it to be out of line with the Divine purpose. And as she won her fight, her unconscious fascination shared in the process of purification. She became able to snare souls for God, "coming over" them indescribably—the thing is always indescribable—commanding respect indeed by the integrity of her character, but captivating too by a sort of rainbow radiance, the feminine appeal cleansed from its possible baseness, drawing hearts no longer away from God, but towards Him who is the Ground of all beauty and all joy.

### 3. *The Hut in the Garden*

Rose was about eighteen when she won her parents' permission to remain unmarried and follow some form of religious life. Probably they expected her to enter a convent—when news of her intention leaked out all the convents in Lima wanted her as a member. Instead, she took two years to decide what she was going to do. Not that she was in doubt as to her own wishes—she immediately improvised a regime that expressed her instinctive desires. But only after a considerable interval did she make this interim regime her settled way of life.

One thing that kept her from hurrying off to a convent was her strong feeling of what she owed to her family. Rose was unusually skilled in two handicrafts, embroidery and gardening. She began to give a good eight hours a day to work for the support of the household, prospering so well in her "little trade" that at one time she was the chief source of income. Both her embroidery and her flowers had an extra touch of loveliness which made them easy to sell, and she worked over both with a steadiness and speed which roused comment in that lethargic climate.

A second thing which kept her hesitating was that she longed

to follow St. Catherine of Siena, but there was no Dominican convent in Lima, either of regular nuns or of the Third Order. There were Friars, of course, and a group of women of the Third Order living a devout life in their own homes. This Dominican Third Order is an elastic affair, adaptable to all kinds of circumstances; an instance likely to be in our minds is the way Eric Gill and his band of craftsmen organized themselves as Dominican Tertiaries in our own time. It offers as useful a scheme of life for women; Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, Rose, when she became a Catholic and started to help poor people suffering from cancer in New York, ultimately organized her band of helpers as a community of the Third Order. Rose de Flores prophesied that there would be a convent of Dominican Tertiaries in Lima after her death, and that her mother would be a nun in it. (How annoyed poor Maria was! Yet it came true; Rose in heaven got her way with her mother as much as Rose on earth.) As no such convent existed during her lifetime, however, Rose's pet plan, the one in the end adopted, was that she should take vows as a Dominican Tertiary and remain on at home, living a life of seclusion, prayer and work in the heart of her family.

What kept her hesitating was the opposition of people whose advice she respected; even those who thought there might be something in it were slow to give their consent. Rose, however, did not wait for the end of the discussions before plunging into the tasks to which she knew herself called. To her prayers and penances she gave each day a good twelve hours. As her gardening and embroidery called for daylight, this meant that her prayers had mostly to be put in at night. Now, a regime of this kind does not combine well with family hours. Moreover, as long as she was in the house, Rose could be interrupted by visitors at any hour of the day. This was good neither for her work nor her prayer. Even during her waiting time she must secure a greater measure of privacy.

In this quandary she bethought herself of a hut of boughs which she and Ferdinand had made as children and which she had called her "hermitage." It had sheltered her from prying

eyes, and she had spent so much time there that when anyone wanted her they used to say: "Go and look for her in the garden: that is her bedroom, her workroom, her oratory." That little hermitage had long since fallen to bits after the fashion of children's handiwork. Rose now asked her mother for leave to make another, of more permanent materials, as a place to spend the day safe from interruptions.

Maria de Flores flatly refused to let her daughter bury herself in this fashion. Rose did not argue. She first asked Our Lady for a sign of God's will for her, and having obtained it she enlisted her confessor and her friends Gonzalez and Maria de Massa to intercede with her mother on her behalf. Gonzalez de Massa was the Royal Receiver in Lima, a man holding an important public position, and he and his wife were among Rose's warmest partisans. To entreaty from such a quarter Rose's mother at once yielded. In a couple of days the hut was built, this time of wood. The floor space was about four feet by five—"big enough for the Beloved of my soul and me"—a tiny chamber lighted by a tiny window. The furniture consisted of a lifesize cross or crucifix against the wall and Rose's embroidery frame. For many years she worked standing, and when weakness forced her to give this up her seat was only a narrow plank of wood. For perhaps ten years this primitive retreat was the centre of Rose's life.

The de Massas can hardly have foreseen this when they lent her their help, for they were strongly of opinion that Rose ought to enter a convent. Unlike some opinions, this one was backed with sound reasons. Rose evidently had a vocation to the contemplative life. But contemplation demands solitude and regularity if it is to reach its full flower, and the de Flores household assured her neither. Gonzalez de Massa felt this so strongly that even after her profession as a Dominican Tertiary he offered to provide her with a dowry in order that she might enter a Carmelite convent.

Rose, however, did not swerve. She had gone very thoroughly into the question while it was under discussion, and had even at

one time prepared to enter the Convent of St. Clare in Lima. Two things had stopped her. The Sunday before she was to enter she went to the beloved Chapel of the Rosary in the Dominican church, to say good-bye to the historic statue which had saved Lima in the Indian rising, and to which she was greatly devoted. And when it was time to go, behold! she could not rise from the ground. Even her brother could not pull her to her feet. As he tugged, it flashed into Rose's mind that here was God's answer—He wished her to belong to the Dominicans. Some days later, as she was walking in the fields, a great black-and-white butterfly—the Dominican colours—fluttered about her so persistently that she took it as a further sign: she was to be a Dominican in the only way possible in Lima, as a Tertiary living at home.

Rose's decision was not of course based on oddities like these, but on a painstaking survey of the situation and a serious effort to discover God's will as distinct from her own wishes. As, however, her wishes were, in Liman eyes, as odd as these incidents, it may have required the odd incidents to crystallize her decision. That, after all, is one function of miracle—to set the seal on a faith or a choice arrived at by the honest use of our faculties, yet just so much "on the edge of things" that honesty itself hesitates to clinch the decision. Miracle does not call faith into being, though the seed it quickens may be invisibly small; it shows up what is there already, the honesty or dishonesty of mind and will before the challenge of God. This is a constant feature of miracle in the Christian story, from the Gospels down to, say, Lourdes. To the dishonest, miracle offers a last chance of sincerity; but the honest mind it lifts over its last sincere hesitancy.

We are so used to independent action on the part of young women that we can hardly realize how bold Rose looked to contemporaries: an unmarried girl living a secluded life under her father's roof hardly strikes us as excitingly unconventional. Moreover, some centuries earlier it would not have struck people quite as it did at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In

the Middle Ages, at least in some countries, the anchoress had a recognized place in the pattern of the religious life, and though St. Rose was not strictly an anchoress, since she had freedom to move about on errands of charity, she was a break-back to an earlier type once fairly common but in her own days most rare. And for reason good. The Council of Trent had enacted strict enclosure for religious women as the best means towards ending a state of disorder. And public opinion was almost fiercely behind the enactment.

The result was greatly to curtail women's freedom of action; it took several generations for women to regain the right to vary from this one uniform pattern. St. Rose's contemporary, St. Francis of Sales, had to give up his plan for a community of women to nurse the sick poor in their own homes, so strong was the opposition of devout opinion. A half-generation later, St. Vincent de Paul got the Sisters of Charity going only by arranging that they should not be technically religious since they do not take vows. Even convent schools were strenuously resisted at first. And all this hostility came from the laity at least as much as from the clergy. Nor was it simply Mrs. Grundyism. Bitter experience had left Catholics extremely suspicious of the less conventional manifestations of the religious life, a suspicion that embarrassed the career of more than one Saint. Enclosure had seemed a final solution of the problem, particularly in the eyes of the laity, who saw no harm in a more rigid uniformity than is characteristic of the works of God.

All this explains why Rose needed such a long time to make up her mind to do what she instinctively wanted to do. It also explains the extreme care she took to keep within what convention allowed to young girls. Since she had to challenge public opinion on a big issue she would not weaken her case by small exasperations. Indeed, she found in this petty thwarting, thwarting at times of her finest spiritual impulses, an instrument of mortification, since it called for the surrender of her own will, not to human wisdom but to commonplace opinions. No unmarried girl, for instance, appeared in the streets of Lima unless

accompanied by an older woman, and even then heavily veiled. This put a brake on Rose's works of charity, at least until she was old enough for the town to feel that such a rule could not reasonably apply to her—besides, she in time earned its confidence. As soon as public opinion gave her a little more freedom Rose took advantage of it to increase her charitable works, though even then she moved with great circumspection. But the brake she felt most was on something more intimate, her longing for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Rose made it a rule never to go to church unless her mother could take her. As Maria de Flores could not be bothered to go more than three times a week, Rose was giving up a privilege which any convent would have secured her, her daily Mass.

This situation sheds an interesting light on an interesting body of men, her confessors. Rose never came under any one notable director; she made use of such direction as offered, in a town where the personnel was subject to the frequent transfers of the tropics. In all, eleven priests at different times acted as her confessor, some of them Dominicans, some Jesuits. The remarkable thing is that, where lay opinion would have hurried her into a convent, there should have been this considerable body of clergy—and quite a chance-met collection—who were willing to give her ideas a hearing and a trial. They knew the difficulties at least as well as any young girl. Yet in a new country where passions were crude and the proprieties compensatingly rigid, they were prepared to think it possible that God is not entirely bound by human ideas of fitness. They gave themselves time to sift out the situation. After all, Rose had little to offer on her side save what we should call "subjective considerations"; that in fact was the root of her own hesitancy, a fear that this strong inner prompting was nothing but her own selfwill. The only serious objective factor she had to bring forward was her family's need of her earnings. All the rest belonged to that world of inner urges where self-deception finds its easiest field.

One factor must have weighed heavily on the side of the convent—her penances. Rose's penances went far beyond what



any convent would have allowed, even in the most austere Orders, and the rule-of-thumb solution would have been to get her under authority somewhere, where her practices could be controlled. All her confessors tried to moderate her penances; but though she always obeyed them, she nearly always talked them round into letting her resume what she had given up at their word. Until quite the end of her life the modifications they managed to introduce were of the slightest. They all testify to her marvellous persuasiveness. Her words were few, but so earnest, so humble and so reasonable that they quickly convinced. Her confessors yielded to the conviction that her "subjective considerations" were, in fact, a genuine Divine prompting.

What made them so sure that God was with her was her humility. Though she generally got her way, she never took it; she begged for it. Her keen aliveness to the danger of self will and self-deception was all the more impressive alongside her clearness of mind and strength of purpose. Where any choice offered, she favoured whichever offered the most secret renunciation of her own will. To know one's own mind yet be willing to surrender one's own way—the combination is, at the mildest, rare. In the end her confessor consented, and in 1606, when she was twenty, Rose de Flores took the vows and the habit of a Dominican Tertiary.

Her confessor insisted on one modification of her plan: he would not allow her to live entirely solitary. Both for her own sake and for theirs, he arranged that she receive her fellow-Tertiaries at stated hours. These were married women giving themselves to prayer and works of charity in their own homes, and their support counted for much as Rose developed her own special charities. Most of them were well off, whereas Rose's own resources were of the slenderest.

Two classes of people made an especial appeal to her, women who had come down in the world, and abandoned Indian women—abandoned often in every sense of the word. Rose did much to seek out and help women who had been well off but were now all but starving behind a brave facade of appearances. Such help

has to be given with the utmost secrecy and is always one of the stiffest problems in the path of charity. Her Tertiary friends were probably just too well-off to gain ready confidence from such women; Rose, whose own family was poor, was better placed for penetrating their poor little secrets. It is characteristic of the whole group, however, that they should have preferred work of this most unshowy kind, work which would have been ruined by the least breath of kudos for themselves.

Even more characteristic, however, was Rose's work for poor Indian women, for this shows the bent of her thinking. She talked so little about her deeper ideas and motives—even her confessors had difficulty in extracting an account of her inner life—that they have to be gathered in the main from what she did. Now, these neglected Indian women, flung out to die of disease, were in one sense an obvious challenge to compassion, and this challenge Rose answered. But they were a challenge to something else. Rose was a member of the conquering race which had brought these poor souls to such a pass; they were the victims of a great wrong in which Rose, merely by being a Spaniard, had her share. . . . All this throws light on what she meant when, among the motives of her penances, she named "souls engaged in sins" and "reparation for the outrages offered to God."

Rose was in day-to-day contact with the consequences of sin as she brought these miserable Indians into her own home—she had begged a couple of rooms from her mother, who let her have them but protested angrily at the filth and infection brought within her doors. Most of them were in the last stages of disease, all were in a state of indescribable squalor, and their spiritual state corresponded only too well with the physical. It was the most unrepaying kind of work, for there could be no stream of healed and regenerated Indian women to advertise what she was doing. They passed from her hands to the grave.

And Rose took no direct steps to dry up the stream. She made no sort of attack or protest against what was going on. She did not expostulate with her countrymen or try to rouse their

consciences or bring home to them the wickedness of what they were doing. She took that wickedness upon herself, making reparation in her own person for the sins of her brethren. She identified herself with the sinners by making her own the consequences of their sins. That is one motive of her penances.

The strange thing is that the penitential urge should have possessed her years before she could have been aware of the occasion for it. It was a direct inspiration to her from Our Lord. It was He who chose her for a task which urgently needed doing, the task of offering expiation for the sins of the conquering race. More than once when Rose wearied of her penances (and no wonder!) both Our Lord and Our Lady appeared to her to encourage her to go on with them. The event justified St. Rose. Her hidden life of penance—its details were not known till after her death—did more for the Indians, and more for the whites, than any campaign of protest could have done.

Is this inconceivable? Well, let us consider an episode where the fruits were immediate. When Rose was about twenty-five or twenty-six there took place, not exactly a native rising, but a sudden withdrawal of the natives from the religion of their conquerors. But the idolatry to which they returned was an idolatry shorn of all its sweeter aspects; everywhere the revolt was an uprush of the dark powers of the human heart. A further note of terror was added when a village of relapsed people was swallowed by an earthquake. But terror is catching. The dark wave swept through the country, sucking down natives and whites alike. The clergy were helpless against its satanic power.

At this juncture there came to Lima another Saint, St. Francis Solan, from the Argentine, and he tried to meet terror with terror. His preaching is compared to that of Jonas: "Yet forty days and Nineve shall be destroyed." It is not easy to see what other line public preaching could have taken, but the result was unfortunate, a panic which froze up contrition. Fear could not release men from the hypnotic fascination of the Indian terror-religion.

In this impasse Rose took her instruments of penance, among

them the terrible iron chains she used as a discipline, shut herself into her garden cell, and there scourged herself till she was bleeding from head to foot. She had a passionate love for her own people and her own city, and with all her ardour she offered herself to God as a victim in their place. . . . And about dusk a new spirit crept through the town. Panic gave way to repentance. First one ringleader, then another, melted into contrition. The good spirit spread as magnetically as the evil spirit had done. All night the clergy were kept up hearing confessions, and dawn broke on a Lima "clothed and in its right mind." The satanic spell was broken.

Multiply the effect of this single penance for a single rebellion, and we begin to see why Rose did more for the Indians than all the South American reformers, for she provided the necessary soil for reform: expiation.

#### 4. *But Why Expiation?*

Clearly, we cannot get on until we have faced this issue of expiation—an idea unwelcome in itself and doubly unwelcome through its disuse for many generations. It is striking that, in all the discussion of the problem of suffering which has gone on intermittently since 1914, expiation is the one idea that has never been brought forward. It is not that it has been weighed and found wanting; it simply has not been considered. There is a tacit agreement that, whatever suffering may mean, it cannot mean this.

This shying away is rooted in something very fundamental, the partial atrophy of our sense of solidarity. Expiation is an expression of the solidary life of man; if then his solidarity loses meaning for him, expiation must lose meaning with it. There is no room for expiation in any individualistic system of morals, whether its keynote be justice or love. It is only as justice and love are seen to have a solidary as well as an individual connotation that expiation is seen, or more usually felt, to be rooted in the moral order. Hence our primary problem is not to justify

expiation; it is to restore solidarity to function. Once that is done, expiation will reawaken of itself. As a matter of fact, this is already happening; with the renewal of our social consciousness we find a renewal, dim and groping as yet, since it is without a directive ideal, of the universal human instinct for expiation.

For expiation is a worldwide instinct of man. Wherever we find human beings we find this impulse to make up for wrong by pain. Intuitively, men everywhere know that there is a hidden connection between suffering and sin, a connection not exhausted by the punishment of the guilty but calling also for expiation by the pure. This demand for a pure victim is one of the strangest but also one of the most constant insights of man. Suffering is recognized as having a purifying function, not for the individual sinner so much as for the whole solidarity in which the sin has occurred. But it must be the suffering of the pure. Only so can it cleanse the impure and open a road into the future. This future reference is one of the most important aspects of expiation.

It is sheer question-begging to dismiss all this as "primitive." Little as we may like it, civilized conduct springs from the same instinctive roots as savage conduct. We must never ask to be civilized out of our ultimate humanity. The problem of civilization is not to uproot primitive urges but to turn them into channels worthy of our status as rational beings. It is not "advanced" to repress expiation any more than to repress sex; it is merely subhuman. And for all such subhumanity nature presents a heavy bill in neuroticism and devitalization.

At the same time, no instinct can be safely left to its own blind action; it needs to be harnessed to a wholesome ideal. That is how the blind, unconscious life of instinct is brought into harmony with our conscious rational aims. The attempt to live by instinct alone is as disastrous as the attempt to live by reason alone, and for the same cause—we are mixed beings, and our life is only wholesome when every genuine element in our nature is expressed, fittingly and in harmony with other genuine elements. Reason is the most distinctive thing about us and the thing that

should be in control. But instinct is the more dynamic, and unless it is accepted there is no raw material for reason to control. Instinct not only furnishes the motive power for action; it points, though blindly, to our legitimate ends. The plea for a place for expiation is the same as the plea for a place for sex—that it is inescapably part of our make-up. Neither indeed can be uncritically trusted; its crude force is apt to explode in crude manifestations. What is wanted, for sex and for expiation alike, is a wisely chosen ideal to which the driving power of instinct can be harnessed.

People are turned against expiation, as some are against sex, by their revulsion from its undesirable manifestations. It is, however, a mistake to judge a fundamental instinct by such undesirable expressions; closer inquiry will generally show that the undesirableness comes, not from the instinct, but from some erroneous ideal to which it has been harnessed. Instincts can be harnessed to very various ideals, indeed to contrary ideals. Thus the ascetic impulse has been harnessed to such conflicting doctrines as these: What is the matter with man is his separate individuality; therefore the aim of asceticism is to purge him of his self-hood.—The individual is the highest thing we know; therefore the aim of asceticism is to bring the individual to his highest perfection.—What is the matter with man is his material body; therefore the aim of asceticism is to reduce the material element in life to a minimum.—The highest good is the welfare of the body, therefore the aim of asceticism is to develop the body, through athletic training, to its highest possible fitness. . . . All this tells us nothing about the ascetic impulse itself, save that it always manages to find an outlet of some kind. There is therefore no reason why it should not be harnessed to a doctrine saner than any of these: the body is good but not the highest good; therefore it should be handled in the interests of something better than itself.

In any inquiry into the meaning of suffering, it is essential to realize at the outset that the answer will have to be in terms of courage, not of cowardice. And this because we are what we are.

No cowardly solution will ever content us, because braver elements in our make-up will always be knocking at the door.

But there is a form of courage peculiarly relevant to the issue, the courage that is willing to grow. What we have it in us to become is constantly at work unsettling what we at the moment are. An answer in terms of our actual stage of growth can always be upset by any further growth. Therefore we have to make up our minds, also at the outset, that any answer capable of contenting us will be in terms of our final stage of growth. It will represent something much braver, wiser, more just and more loving than we are as yet, or than we are very likely to be on this earth. Clearly then there has to be a large element of *trust* in the business. Our most urgent need is Someone we can trust to carry us through the unfolding processes of growth, Someone we can back through thick and thin to be right, no matter what alarming predicaments He leads us into. For our quest must lead us into strange territories, where the experience of our out-grown phases may be as much a hindrance as a help. This willingness to go forward at all costs is a *sine qua non* to any successful quest for the meaning of pain.

A sound way of starting is to look round a little and see if there are any forms of pain which do not normally awaken question. We do not have to go very far in order to find two types of suffering which human beings normally accept as a matter of course: suffering which develops personality, and suffering which is a just punishment of the guilty. Of a charming fellow who has never known trouble we say, "He doesn't know he was born," meaning that immaturity is too high a price to pay for immunity. And, "Well, he fairly asked for it" covers a wide variety of cases which do not disturb our moral sense. The conception of justice may vary widely; what does not vary is that, if the sense of justice be satisfied—and it can be uneducated and crude—men do not revolt morally at pain. The Penitent Thief spoke for something deeply virile in our race when, of his own crucifixion, he said, "But we justly."

The thing that is so common to-day, a revolt against pain as

pain, is a very unusual state of affairs, as unusual as the widespread breakdown of the human which we are witnessing. The modern outcry, one suspects, has some connection with the modern dehumanization. Everything that could help us to interpret pain has long since been dumped on the dustheap. The fraction of our nature that we are prepared to acknowledge is little more than the familiar "bundle of nerves." So we are left to hold the baby. Having thrown away everything that could give a meaning to pain, there remains with us nothing but the pain. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

And yet, if we will only rake over the dustheap we shall find it yields quite a useful handful of clues. Any solution can only be for those willing to experiment in taking back discarded bits of our nature. For us to-day, the testing resumption is the spiritual significance of our solidarity, as distinct from its material convenience. Once this is admitted, we have a new field in which to search for overlooked manifestations of both justice and love. And here the twin forms of suffering which do not provoke revolt come sharply into the picture: through the solidarity of man, we begin to see further into the *cause* of suffering (sin calling for punishment) and into its *effects* (the development of higher potentialities in our personality). This will mean an enormous step forward, for it will mean bringing a larger amount of pain securely into the world of meaning, that is, the world of intelligible cause and effect.

How much of our misery comes from meaninglessness we can hardly appreciate until the load is, even partially, lifted from our minds. This is to gain a real vantage point, to pass from the glacier to the mountain itself. The going may become steeper, but it gains in direction. As we go on, we discover more and more the part played by suffering in lifting us to a higher level where new ranges of meaning come into our view. Of course, this does not happen automatically; it is the fruit of a co-operation of our wills with our circumstances, and the more fully willed that co-operation the wider becomes our range of vision.



As we gain a measure of assurance, the fruit of experience, we discover in ourselves a new capacity to lessen the sufferings of others, usually by showing them also how to cross from the glacier to the mountain. As we find that our sufferings can be made profitable to travellers other than ourselves, we make what is perhaps the most revealing discovery of our journey. For we become able to see a little way into the lives of men and women who have deliberately chosen suffering as their way of bringing help to their fellows. To arrive at this point may be as dizzying as to find oneself suddenly standing at the top of a precipice which one is hardly aware of having climbed.

If these are real pieces of the puzzle—and if they are not, it is difficult to imagine what real pieces there can be—they are also pointers pointing straight at expiation. . . . And this is a most unwelcome conclusion, since it calls for a revision of inherited preconceptions on a more drastic scale than we may be quite ready to face. It may be necessary to remind ourselves rather firmly that the true solution can only be in terms of courage, particularly the courage that is ready for growth.

Most of us inherit an interpretation of Christ's death which ignores the fact of human solidarity. We may not be aware of this, but we do in fact inherit it. To confuse the issue still further, this interpretation has run through two phases. In the first, expiation was treated as the exclusive prerogative of Christ. In the second, it was dismissed as an immoral hangover from primitive ways of thinking. The reason is clear: it is not possible for human beings to go on indefinitely seeing meaning in something which has no place in their own experience. Expiation confined to Christ alone is bound to drift into the category of meaningless things; and in that case it can only be explained historically, as something outgrown and outworn.

At the same time, there is an element of truth which we have to face. If Christ made expiation for our sins He did so in a sense exclusive to Himself. If there is such a thing as expiation—and all human experience points insistently towards it—then the death of Christ is utterly unique. It is in a class by itself. It alone

is "a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." These words are from the Communion Service of the Church of England, but they would be subscribed by all Christians who accept the expiatory character of Christ's death.

But from this utter uniqueness there are two possible inferences, not one. Either Christ's death washes out the expiatory character of all other suffering, or else it gives that expiatory character a new sanction and range. Which inference we draw depends on our minor premiss. If our minor premiss is individualism, we conclude, correctly, that Christ is the sole expiator; for where the human solidarity is without spiritual significance only an arbitrary act can meet the situation. The snag then is that the arbitrary act is bound in time to become also meaningless, since men cannot go on indefinitely perceiving meaning in what they do not share. . . . If, however, our minor premiss is solidarity, we conclude, equally correctly, that Christ has endowed our sufferings with new expiatory value, provided we suffer "in Him." If this is so, we find Christ utilizing a principle already at work in human affairs, the suffering of the innocent for the guilty. And if He has raised the whole issue to a new plane, that is only what we should expect of Him who said, "I am not come to destroy but to fulfil."

According to individualism, there is nothing to fulfil. Our solidarity with one another is devoid of spiritual significance; any significance it has is exhausted in terms of our material well-being. That is why individualism has always been stumped by innocent suffering, so much so that it has always been tempted to say there can be no such thing: all suffering must have been deserved by the sufferer himself, whether in this life or in another state of existence. The idea of trouble as part of God's training may not wholly fall out of sight, for people in a muddle seldom bother to be consistent. But the main effect of this way of thinking is to cut the connection between our troubles and the Cross of Christ. And then both His Cross and our troubles equally lose their meaning.

Naturally, then, individualism has made heavy weather of the Death of Christ, since that is the supreme instance of innocent suffering. And it is striking that the individualist theories of the Atonement have been driven to retain the conception of solidarity just here: Christ's death has atoning power because He became a member of the human race. He entered the human solidarity in order to redeem it from within. . . . But there they cut off sharply, drawing an arbitrary line between Christ's solidarity with us and our solidarity with each other.

There is no reason whatsoever for drawing that line—indeed, the effect is to reduce such theories of the Atonement to nonsense. For if our solidarity with each other were without spiritual significance, there would be no point in Christ's becoming solidary with us. . . . Actually, what Christ did was to seize hold of our solidarity at its most bewildering point, innocent suffering. By a Divine act of brigandage (for that is much what it comes to) He took possession of it as His own spoils of war. He forced into the service of meaning the most confoundingly meaningless thing in our experience.

For—mark this well—suffering is not a good. In itself it is simply evil, and left to itself its effects are also evil. There is no question of getting good out of it, but of putting good in. If this can be done, it amounts to a conquest of suffering in another area than its elimination. Suppose we were ever to eliminate suffering from this world, we should still be left with the question of all the suffering that has taken place. Even the joy of heaven is not—quite—enough of an answer to the pains of earth. We need some kind of a triumph, here and now, just where we live. Even though it does not cover all cases, or reach all lives (for there is no universal answer, there are only clues which reduce patches of chaos to order), the mere potentiality is of enormous importance. For one thing, it is these patches of order which nerve us to go on with the battle against unnecessary or unfruitful pains.

Moreover, all this is in line with man's best insights from the beginning of his story. He has always had some inkling of all

this; even at his most groping he has never met suffering passively—unless where paralysed by enervating doctrines—but had swung against it the resources of his personality. Indeed, it is thus that he has discovered his resources. This power to force suffering to co-operate in some measure with his spiritual ends makes itself felt even in very primitive phases of human development. It was something deeply and richly human which Our Lord captured, and which He swung into action on the hill called Calvary.

But is it enough—does anyone feel it enough?—that He should thus utilize the most sensitive point of our solidarity for His own task and forbid us to use it for ours? After all, it has not pleased God to take suffering from us, merely because Christ has atoned for all our sins. Suffering remains a most real element in our experience. If Christ's pain alone has spiritual significance, how are we any further on?

The whole tone of the New Testament bids us look in another direction. If there is one thing more than another which distinguishes Christianity from other spiritual religions it is its entire freedom from contempt. While it is open-eyed towards man's limitations, inadequacies and sins, it refuses to say to a brother, "Thou fool." Man's strivings before Christ and without Him are ravelled by man's blunders and stained by man's crimes; yet there is in them some seed of good, some trace of his original God-given nature. Christianity alone has the patience to hunt through the confusion to disentangle and release this truly human element, the thing that God Himself put there when He made man. Everywhere in the sin-flawed creature it expects to find something which grace can lift to a new level and endow with a new range of capacity.

For though Calvary completes and crowns this long history of groping, it does not put a full-stop to it. Neither does it continue the tale at the same level. Christ indeed gathered up a whole world of obscure insights and fumbling intuitions, coming by their means into relation with our deepest, most primal needs. But He did not halt there. He went on to re-found

human nature as a new order, a new kingdom, a new organism unified and energized by grace. For this new organism there are many names. Our Lord called it the Vine and the Branches, St. Paul the Body of Christ. It is a "new creation," a rise in the level of being as different from ordinary man as man is different from the beast, or the beast from the earth which he paws. In it all things are made new—yet old things are not tossed aside. Everything that makes man man is retained in the Mystical Body of Christ, yet it is touched to new powers giving it a new range of operation. Thus reason flowers into faith yet does not cease to be reason. So also solidarity flowers into a new closeness of texture, "the brotherhood" of Scripture. And with solidarity, expiation attains, in the life of the Mystical Body, a depth and delicacy of range and capacity which make it, to all intents, a new force in human affairs. For now it comes charged with the redeeming love of Calvary. "I, Paul . . . who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His Body, which is the Church."<sup>1</sup> Such is the charter of the great expiatory Saints.

This is no academic issue. Every society as it functions get into what doctors call a toxic state; the accumulated poisons of sins and mistakes spread through the whole solidarity, paralysing, or at least enervating, the effort at right order which we call reform. At the physical level, it is this progressive poisoning which kills us in the end; our bodies as they grow older cease to be able to rid themselves of these poisons as fast as they are manufactured. And societies also die of accumulated moral poisons unless they find some means to cleanse themselves and so renew their youth.

One of the great things which Christianity has contributed to human life is a method of moral detoxication. This method is penance. It operates, of course, within the sphere of the individual life; each one has the duty to carry out his own moral detoxication. But that is not enough to keep society wholesome,

<sup>1</sup> Colossians i, 24.

if only because certain individuals fail to supply their individual share. Thanks, however, to the principle of solidarity, raised to a new vigour of organic life in the Body of Christ, it is possible for selected individuals—selected, that is, by God—to come to the help of the Body as a whole. They can, so to speak, specialize in detoxication, becoming as it were the phagocytes of the Mystical Body, rushing to any wound, especially where a “foreign body” has entered, to cleanse the tissues and cast out the irritant. And it is noteworthy that whenever the Body of Christ is in fact wounded, whether by the malice of enemies or the infidelities of Christians, the immediate response is a new army of phagocytes, that is, of penitential Saints. Moreover, these phagocytes are not only exceptionally innocent individuals, a surprisingly high proportion consists of young girls. Mother-love, touched to a new self-sacrifice, pours itself out upon the spiritually backward and needy, the delinquent children of the household of Faith.

To attempt social reform without this work of detoxication is to apply a bandage to a dirty wound; the wound cannot heal until it has been rendered sterile. Which sheds a bright light on the disappointing results of social reform in our own midst. Sin has to be expiated, not merely corrected. It is not enough to do better next time; there is a hangover from the first time, an injury to the tissues of the soul which vitiates the attempt at doing right. Our own reform effort, though noble in intention, has been largely stultified for want of penance. For that means that the original evil is still at work as an irritant. As an example, the poor have neither forgotten nor forgiven the wrongs they endured a hundred years ago before the first factory acts. Even worse, they have been themselves infected by the materialistic ideals invoked to justify those wrongs—the falsehoods which bred industrialism are also breeding the revolt against it. And men are hardened in these bad attitudes, in greed, envy and the love of power, by the lack of any real penitence on the part of the wrong-doing classes, and by a very clear perception that much of the reform granted has had its motive simply in fear and desire

to hold on to the loot. . . . This is a wound in the very entrails of society, and one that needs not simply to be bandaged but to be sterilized. And the only sterilizing agent is penance. Until penance is supplied, on a scale commensurate with the original wrong, our wounds will be perpetually reinfected by the irritant of unexpiated sin.

So we can find in our valley of Achor "an opening of hope," for our very miseries can be used as the redemption price of the future. Not indeed automatically—undeserved suffering by itself achieves nothing, indeed it may merely turn the knife in the wound. But in measure as it is united to the Cross of Christ it draws thence redemptive power. . . . It remains, however, almost impossible for ordinary hard-pressed mortals even to see this, still less to keep hold upon it, unless we are given a lead by chosen individuals going far beyond what we shall be called upon to do ourselves. If we are saved by hope, then we owe that hope in large measure to the expiatory Saints.

The story of St. Rose of Lima is a first-rate illustration of all these principles. She lived in a society where a great wrong had been committed, and belonged herself to the fine flower of the wrong-doing race. There was urgent need of reform, reform of the relations between savage and civilized man—and her penances gave reform its chance, for she sterilized the wound. The effort of reform had been present from the lifetime of Columbus himself, but it had hitherto been baffled by the toxic state set up by a wild orgy of greed—a less wicked thing, possibly, than the cold, calculating greed which is our own heritage. Not until St. Rose's expiatory work was done did the reformers find a clear field—a fact full of meaning for our own times, if only as a reminder that the "magnetic field" of expiation is the Mystical Body of Christ.

5. *Thorns Amid the Flowers*

To keep St. Rose's story from disintegrating into a mere catalogue of endurances it is well to hold four points before our minds.

The first is that her beloved Peru—and she loved her country—had been the scene of one of the most shocking crimes of history, the destruction of the Inca civilization by Pizarro's jail-birds. Further, this early criminal phase had left its mark on the practice of the whites in their dealings with the Indians. Something of that practice Rose came to know as she grew up and it appears to have shed light for her upon her penitential urges. For we must be careful not to read the connection the wrong way round. Rose did not take to penance because of what she saw of the Indians; what she saw of the Indians helped her to understand the call to penance which had sounded in her heart since she was six.

The second point is that Rose's life does in fact mark a turning-point in the history of colonization. But we need to mark what that turning-point was. It was not the moment at which humane treatment of native races displaced cruel treatment. It was the moment at which humane treatment was invited to move to the higher plane of just treatment. By Rose's day the first atrocities were a legend; her generation probably prided itself on the humanity with which it (in the main) treated a sometimes dangerous subject population. Indeed, the danger was lest men should settle down contentedly to the humane operation of a fundamentally unjust system. This unjust system, like our own wage-slavery, was in fact no better than a camouflaged system of slavery, however softened by humanitarianism.

Moreover, as time brought other ventures in colonization, South America, comparing its practices with events elsewhere, could have been strongly tempted to spiritual pride on the score of its superior humanity—and there is nothing like a sense of superiority to prevent growth. If Spanish America did not stick



at this very sticky point—for it is far harder to move men from humanity to justice than from cruelty to humanity—much of the credit must go to St. Rose. One result of her penances is that the later history of the natives of South and Central America is markedly better than in regions which had a less sensationally wicked start. We need to see Rose de Flores where she belongs—in the big perspectives of history.

At the same time we must make sure that we see Rose herself in proper perspective, and this is our third point. That she had a will of her own is obvious. Yet the most remarkable thing in her story is not the way she asserted her will but the way she surrendered it. Certainly it took enormous force of character to carry out her penitential programme, force of love and understanding as well as strength of purpose. But the whole thing could easily have degenerated into sheer wilfulness and “showing off,” without moral significance or spiritual leverage. What put the fulcrum under her lever was the perfect surrender of her will, to her parents, to her confessors, even to the rigid decorum of the period. It was this surrender which generated the “head of power” in her life, flooding her penances with a life-giving energy that quickened a whole continent.

Lastly, there is the girl herself. Rose was not what is described as “cast in a heroic mould.” Engaging wilfulness rather than majestic dominance was her strong suit. Physically, of course, she was a spell-binder. Mentally and morally she was affectionate and fastidious, with a keen eye for beauty and a turn both for poetry and for wit—a combination of sensibility, brains and ardour which might have made either a lover or an artist, but hardly a great heroic figure. Her health was seldom good and often downright bad. The lap of luxury should have been her natural habitat, that luxury which circumstances (with a little judicious manipulation) so very fittingly offered her. A more unlikely choice for a life of expiation it would be hard to find.

A small incident which took place soon after her profession tells us more about Rose than volumes of analysis. After receiving the habit as a Dominican Tertiary when she was about twenty,

Rose markedly increased her penitential practices, with the result that she soon began to look haggard. Pitying comments followed her down the street as she walked to church with her mother. Moreover, her mother's visitors apparently discussed her holiness in her presence with as little reticence as they had shown over her beauty. Rose was becoming an object of veneration and was both too honest and too intelligent to blink the fact. She was faced with a temptation to vanity infinitely more subtle than her beauty had ever been.

Her way out was original in the extreme—she prayed that her good looks might be restored. She had, as always, a clear reason for her choice—she saw that this would turn feeling against her, which it did. For her prayer was granted. Her face resumed its healthful contours and exquisite tints. Those who had exclaimed at her fervour now exclaimed more loudly at her hypocrisy. One Lent she had eaten nothing but “a few orange pippins,” ending up by spending thirty hours in church without food or drink. As she was coming home after this ordeal, she was stopped by a party of young libertines, who chaffed her on her good colour and plump cheeks. Pious Lima was disgusted at her while the unpious were amused. . . . This is clearly the same Rose who stuck a needle into her head to counteract her pleasure in wearing a garland, only now it is the garland, so to speak, which is pressed into service to counteract a more insidious temptation, more insidious because more spiritual. The whole struggle had shifted to a higher and more intricate arena. It was because of her victory over the spiritual sin of pride that she was able to generate spiritual powers through the physical acts which God was asking of her.

For one of the most appealing things in her story is the way she revolted at her penances and was called back to them by the gentlest remonstrances of Our Lord. The mere thought of her terrible bed used to set her shuddering. As the time drew near for the two hours' rest—if you can call it rest—which was all she allowed herself, she would be almost rigid with apprehension. And several times on such occasions Our Lord appeared to her,

not angry or reproachful (as she felt He had a right to be), but with gracious looks and gently encouraging words. "Remember, My child," He said to her, "that the bed of the Cross on which I died for love of thee was harder, narrower and more painful than that on which thou art lying; think of the gall which I drank for thy sake, and call to mind the nails which pierced My hands and feet; thou wilt then feel consolation in the terrible pains thou sufferest in thy bed."

It may be doubted whether Rose could have carried through what she did without this special help that was sent her, her visible intercourse with the other world. The Infant Jesus spent hours with her in her hut. Our Lady too was a frequent visitor, and so was St. Catherine of Siena. If God asked much of Rose He also gave much, not only a high degree of mystical union with Himself, but this visible sign and symbol of His nearness. Rose came to the Mystic Marriage which is the closest union with God possible in this world. So was consummated that which had been with her since she was a tiny child, her grasp on the utter *realness* of the Unseen.

And yet, if this realness was allowed to spill over visibly into her life as a makeweight to enable her to bear her penances, it was itself counteracted by mysterious spiritual sufferings. For several hours every day Rose lost not only her visible touch with the other world but her inward grasp as well. She was called upon to identify herself with sinners, not only by sharing the bodily punishment due to their sins, but sharing also their separation from God. It was as if she experienced God as an unrepentant sinner would experience Him were he to become aware of the Divine, that is, as something implacably hostile. It felt to Rose as if God hated her. Her love was left beating against the dark barrier of God's judgement on sin. . . . And whereas her penances did not affect her looks, this spiritual anguish extinguished her beauty. Those who caught an accidental glimpse of her at such times thought she must be dying.

Talk of these strange happenings began to leak out into the town and came to the ears of the Archbishop of Lima, himself a

man of great holiness. Now, the Catholic Church does not "limit the Holy One of Israel"; she does not dictate to God what it is fitting for Him to do. Being Himself the Author of nature and its laws, she recognizes that He has both the power and the right to dispense with those laws as His Infinite Wisdom sees fit; she accepts on evidence His exceptional dealings with those He has called to exceptional intimacy with Himself. But she does not regard strangeness as in itself evidence of the Divine; it must fit, as Christ's miracles fitted, into the moral and spiritual and intellectual order which is also from God. And, in fact, experience has taught her that the bulk of queer happenings are psychological in character, or occasionally directly diabolic. The distinction may be a fine one; after all, the devil is in the selfwill and self-display which lie at the root of many strange manifestations, even if they are not directly demonic. Most of the people to whom queer things happen are definitely unstable, whether physically, mentally or morally may not be always easy to say.

But the recognizable symptoms of all forms of instability are conceit, unreasonableness, desire for the limelight, and desire for power over other lives. Therefore the Catholic Church tests first for humility, reasonableness and love of obscurity; only where these are found will she so much as consider the possibility of Divine intervention. And the practical test which brings these qualities to light is the willingness to submit to properly constituted authority in preference to the exciting possibility of direct Divine illumination. This readiness to surrender to perhaps tactlessly exercised authority is the only thing that makes it even probable that the illumination is genuinely from God. Thus the very pedantry, routine, dullness and pedestrian caution which may characterize the exercise of authority offer the illuminated person an ideal test and safeguard.

Rose passed the test because she valued the safeguard. She was genuinely afraid of self-deception and grateful to anyone who would protect her against it. When summoned before the Archbishop and a group of learned theologians, the strongest impression she made on them was her humility. She so obviously

disliked having the thing known; all her desire was to remain hidden. Since it was her duty to answer to lawful authority, she spoke, but reluctantly and shortly. This brevity struck them all. Instead of pouring out a spate of explanation and justification, she said exactly what was necessary, clearly but in few words. This power of going to the point told strongly in her favour, for it is one mark of a balanced mind. It reinforced the good impression made by her readiness to submit. And as they questioned her they were amazed at her grip on theology, especially mystical theology. For Rose was unlearned, indeed by our ideas almost uneducated. Apart from the public teaching given in the churches she had only the Divine Office to teach her—and her prayers. Yet instinctively her mind moved within the world of Christian orthodoxy, always balanced, coherent and in touch with reason.

In other words, Rose exhibited all the normal signs of a mind moving as a matter of course among realities. Her reasonableness made it possible to think she might be touched with the supra-rational. She had such firm hold on the bread-and-butter moralities of accuracy, modesty and proportion that her intercourse with a higher order was among the possibilities of a coherent universe. She was allowed to resume her way of life, not because her marvels guaranteed her, but because her honesty, humility and selflessness guaranteed her marvels. The theologians decided that God was the author of the strange phenomena of her life, and let her go.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The inquiry was extremely thorough. What they spent most time on was the darkness and desolation which seized her at certain hours: "Some believed that she was deluded, or that what passed in her mind was the effect of her long watchings; others, that they were illusions of the devil which disturbed her imagination; others again attributed them to the heavy vapours which her great abstinence caused to mount from her stomach to her brain." The physiology amuses us to-day, but the psychology could hardly be bettered: the connection between mind and body was thoroughly understood and allowed for. Rose's freedom from the ordinary symptoms of instability, plus her strong positive grasp upon Divine truth—it was these that led them to conclude "that her life was the work of God."

She resumed her routine, working for the support of her family, giving her nights to prayer, and an increasing amount of her time to charitable works. Of the great work of her life, her penances, a good deal has come out in the course of the narrative, but we had better gather up the threads.

Her fasting was prodigious; she ate in a week what would be a bare subsistence for one day, and she was at pains to make that little unpalatable to her taste; her water she took warm. She allowed herself only two hours' rest at night, in that painful bed already described, even though she was often raw from her iron scourge. To conquer sleepiness, she fastened her hair to a nail in the wall that the jerk might awaken her if she nodded. She wore an extra long hair shirt, and reinforced it with the points of pins and needles.

From a tiny child Rose had had great devotion to the thorn-crowned Christ, of which her mother had a picture. She longed especially to share in this suffering of her Beloved, and at one time thought of making a crown of thorns for herself. As it would have been conspicuous in the extreme she devised instead something that could be hidden under her veil—so successfully that apparently for many years no one knew what she was doing.

Then one day her father happened to be beating one of her little brothers more severely than he deserved, and Rose, running in to protect him, got a blow on her head. A trickle of blood on her face made her hurry to her room in hopes to hide what had caused it. But her mother had seen, followed her, and insisted that she take off her veil. Underneath it, Rose was wearing a silver headband with three rows of thirty-three spikes (in memory of the years of Our Lord's earthly life). At the back were strings so that it could be pulled tight, and Rose admitted that she did so pull it tight every Friday. Also, when tempted, or sometimes for a further penance, she would strike herself on the head in order to drive the spikes home. . . . At sight of this terrible instrument her mother was struck dumb. However, she marched Rose off to her confessor, at that time a Jesuit, and he too was all but speechless at the sight. When he recovered, he

"used remonstrance more than authority," says the old Life, and Rose, seeing this, pleaded her cause with such gentle eloquence that he gave in. He filed off some of the points and gave her back the headband.

These things, however, became generally known only after her death. The Rose that Lima knew was a joyous soul, so overflowing with infectious goodness that she could stop and tame a ferocious bull when everyone else fled before it, or cure a fiendish temper with a few words of remonstrance. Those who knew her more intimately had some inkling of what lay behind her serenity, though the thing they most noted was how hard she worked; even with perspiration pouring down her face she plied her needle as diligently as in cooler weather. It was this serenity which drew them, a girl so happy in God that she made everyone share that happiness; even the mosquitoes who at first annoyed her guests left them alone at Rose's request. She certainly had a remarkable power over living creatures, not only animals but plants. This, however, was discovered casually by chance visitors. The everyday Rose was rather critically regarded for not going to church often enough. Yet the radiance of joy she carried about with her made her, in the main, a favourite with the town.

## 6. *The Last Lap*

When Rose was about twenty-eight, she had an illness so serious that her life was despaired of. She, however, told her friends that her hour had not yet come and did in fact recover. But it is clear that from this time her health gave more concern, and her friends asserted themselves more vigorously to get her practices stopped, or at least curtailed. Maria de Flores had the satisfaction of pulling her daughter's bed to bits at the order of her confessor. But when she would have put in a mattress Rose protested, and they compromised on plain boards.

After this illness, for some reason Rose left her father's house and made her home with the de Massas, who had befriended her over the building of her hut as well as many times since. Why the

move was made is not recorded. It was not any coolness with her own family, for they constantly sought her at the de Massas, nor does it seem to have been Rose's own desire—she left her hut in the garden with intense reluctance and often slipped back to visit it; it was of all others the place where God had drawn her so close to Himself. Perhaps the new home was more convenient for her works of charity. Perhaps the de Massas simply begged for her and her parents felt they could not refuse. Anyway, Rose took up her quarters in a tiny room under the roof, living the same sort of life as before, but with the de Massa children as a new object of her affections. She was devoted to them and they to her.

Her hostess, Maria de Massa, stirred up her confessor to assert himself. He did so, making Rose hand over her iron scourge and her hair shirt reinforced with needle points; and he also insisted on means to make her sleep. Unluckily the sleeping draught, or whatever it was that she used, left her so heavy in the mornings that she was apt to drowse on beyond the hour when she was allowed to rise. This distressed her. Whereupon Our Lady came morning by morning to wake her with her caresses, and Rose was comforted.

In the Lent when she was thirty-one, she begged her confessor to let her return to her bed of broken pottery, and on obtaining his leave she rearranged it with eager delight. From childhood she had known that she would not live till her thirty-second birthday, and she wanted to keep her last Lent on earth as lovingly as she could. And now a further intimation reached her: she would die on St. Bartholomew's Day after an illness of great anguish.

A few days before this last illness was to begin, her mother, Maria de Flores, was astonished to hear someone singing in the garden. Looking out, she saw it was Rose, come to pay what was to prove her farewell visit to her "hermitage." She had often come back, but this time there was a touch of unearthly sweetness in her singing which disquieted Maria. Rose had been in the way of easing her bursting heart with improvised songs



which flowed rhythmically from her lips, music and words together. Maria, listening, felt that her daughter was not long for this world, and three days later was summoned to what was to be her dying bed.

On the 31st of July, 1617, Rose was taken mysteriously ill and lay for a week in a condition of intense anguish for which there seemed no assignable cause; it puzzled the doctors entirely. Her poor mother made things worse by pestering her with questions all the time, when her one longing was to turn her whole being to God. She was thus deprived of the one thing that could have given her relief. After a week, however, on the 6th of August, the Feast of the Transfiguration, the character of her illness changed. It now took the form of disorders with which the doctors were familiar, among them "fever, gout, pleurisy, asthma and pneumonia." She also became completely paralysed, except for her speech, and so was completely dependent on the services of others. Out of this arose perhaps her greatest torment, thirst. Rose had foreseen this; she had warned her kind hostess, Maria de Massa, that she would suffer greatly from thirst, begging to be given drink whatever the doctors might say. When the symptom developed, however, the medical science of the period forbade drink, and Maria de Massa felt it right to obey the doctors rather than heed her dear Saint. Rose made no entreaty. She had always renounced her will to rightful authority even when it ran counter to an inward assurance of God's will for her. So now she renounced it again, uniting her sufferings to the thirst of Our Lord upon the Cross.

Indeed, as the three weeks of her agony dragged themselves out, those around her felt more and more that she was re-living Calvary, both in its physical anguish and its spiritual dereliction. And yet, what struck them most was her joy. She remained fully conscious to the last, almost entirely without sleep; no clouding of her mind obscured her pain. Yet, in some mysterious way, she was the sunny Garden Girl she had always been.

On the eve of St. Bartholomew, Rose told her friends that she was going to die, received the Last Sacraments with intense

joy, then made her human farewells. She begged the blessing of her parents and of her protectors, Gonzalez and Maria de Massa; then took a most affectionate leave of the two youngest de Massa girls whom she had particularly taken to her heart. At eight o'clock in the evening she said, "I shall die in four hours," then begged a last blessing from Father Lorenzano (the Dominican who had most often been her director, and who had supported and guided her through the critical years when she was deciding her way of life). When he left, she was alone with her family and her household; only the beloved Ferdinand was not there, for he had taken up an appointment far away. Towards midnight she asked another brother to remove the mattress and pillows from her bed, that she might "die on the wood" like Our Lord. They did as she asked, and as midnight ushered in the Feast of St. Bartholomew, the 26th of August, 1617, Rose de Flores crossed herself, said distinctly, "Jesus! Jesus! Be with me!" and died, so gently that they could hardly believe that she was gone.

And then two strange things happened. Maria de Flores, instead of being overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her favourite child, was so overwhelmed with heavenly joy that she had to retreat hurriedly to another room to conceal her happiness—Rose had told her she was praying especially for comfort for her mother, but the scale on which it came was almost shattering. And Rose's poor tormented body, as soon as the breath was out of it, returned to the beauty of her radiant girlhood. It remained incorrupt for many days, in spite of tropical heat, so that the people of Lima had ample time for their rejoicings. For a friend had received an intimation which all felt fitted the occasion—no mourning must be worn for Rose, for her death was a birth and a marriage, to be celebrated with flowers and joy.

## THE GREAT UNWASHED

SAINT BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE, 1748-83

### 1. *Silhouette Against the Skyline*

IN the days when clouds were massing for the French Revolution, a strange figure passed fitfully across the scene. The mighty never noticed him, for he had reached a degree of destitution which unfitted him for a part in the fashionable pastorals. In Paris his misery might have passed unremarked, but in smaller places men were not yet hardened to a wretchedness which the industrial era was to make a familiar sight. His miserable appearance, ragged, verminous, emaciated, caught the eye of kindly folk not yet deadened to such extremes of need.

A barber-surgeon at Fréjus had opened his ulcers and cleaned his head—to be left feeling that he had ministered to Christ Himself. Near Lyons a farmer named Vianney let him spend the night in his stables—to become one of the legends which nourished his grandson, the Curé of Ars. In a Pyrenean pass a traveller wounded by brigands opened his eyes to find a ragged figure bending over him; and though the soldiers who shortly came up threw the tramp into prison as the likeliest suspect, the victim insisted on his release; he perfectly remembered his attackers, and from this frail waif had received nothing but help. At Barcelona, at Monserrat, at Compostello, his passing left a trace. All across the South of France men had word of him, up into Switzerland, over into Germany, and zigzag across the face of Italy—men and women saw him once and never again forgot. Some, especially country priests, were so struck that they made haste to note down their impressions before these were blurred by time. And then, years later, came seekers trailing, step by step, a Saint. He would have died, they said, as he had lived, on the public highways, had not a butcher named Zaccarelli carried him into a house in Rome.

Those who remembered him had all been affected the same way. First they had shrunk from him as a new and unknown horror—misery so abject that they had never seen before. Then they had been drawn to him, why or how they hardly knew; there came over them a conviction that here was one of the Friends of God. Common sense bade them look close—his youth, his distinction of bearing, his cultivated speech roused their suspicions. But he survived every scrutiny. The more they saw of him the surer they grew that here was supreme holiness. And one after another was left asking whether, in this too brief encounter, he had not met Our Lord.

What was it that thus imprinted him on the minds of chance-met acquaintances who rarely saw him for more than a few days and, outside Italy, never twice? First, his physical misery. His clothes were adequate for modesty but for nothing else; he was little better than skin and bone. Yet those who tried to relieve his wants found that he would never accept anything beyond the immediate needs of the day, and his estimate of those needs could hardly have been pitched more low. Store for the morrow he would not have; if they forced on him more than a crust or a copper he instantly gave it away. Efforts to provide him with more weatherproof clothing were just as successful; if he accepted anything it was to hand it on.

Yet his refusals were so exquisite in their quiet courtesy, his whole bearing so instinct with dignity, that interest was aroused. Who was this young man who walked the roads with downcast eyes and folded arms? What had brought one of his physique and refinement to such a pass? He knew Latin, for he carried a breviary and used it; he spoke as a man of education; he had that *esprit de finesse* which Pascal so admired, a tact which enabled him to hold his path without bruising those whom he set out of his way. Was he perhaps an impostor making a living by trading on the charity of the devout? But a living was just what he did not make; he barely kept soul and body together. Gifts pressed upon him were refused with a quiet firmness which could not be gainsaid. He spent hours in the churches rapt in

prayer; his greatest joy was to be asked to serve a Mass. When he spoke, which was seldom, he spoke of God, with a simple, homely directness which his hearers never forgot. His very name they learned only after his death.

Such was one of the strangest remonstrances which the love of God has ever addressed to the hard self-satisfaction of man.

## 2. *The Landscape*

And remonstrance was needed, for men had no idea of their desperate need.

If the tempestuous sixteenth century had been able to see ahead, it might have hailed the eighteenth as the haven where it would be. Gone were the disorders that had provoked revolt. Parishes and monasteries were well managed and genuinely devout. Village schools brought education within the reach of the poor, girls as well as boys, while a many-sided practical philanthropy cared for their physical needs. Apart from some of the great cities, people in general were devout, in an orderly, painstaking and common-sense fashion. In the country districts—and most people lived in the country—life seemed muffled in immemorial calm; a bad harvest or an epidemic was the worst evil to be feared. The great religious revival of a hundred years earlier had been primarily a movement of the countrysides, thanks to the strategic wisdom of St. Vincent de Paul. And though by the eighteenth century some of the higher clergy were touched with worldliness, the country clergy were immune; the Counter-Reformation ideal of an educated and virtuous priesthood had been largely realized. And this fidelity of the country clergy rested on a broad basis of solid popular piety.

The weakness of the whole lies perhaps in the word *solid*. People who would have indignantly repudiated any infection by the fashionable irreligion had a little too much succumbed to the idea that human wisdom is the measure of all things; the devout had been a little too quick to adjust themselves to the standards

of common sense. And this tiny discoloration on the surface was a symptom of a deep-lying disease: while the Age of Reason was proclaiming the finality of reason, religion was making a serious surrender to the spirit of the age.

For the Counter-Reformation, though it had noble successes to its credit, had one great failure; in spite of all its religious leaders could do, its political leaders had adopted Luther's theory of the relations of Church and State: *cujus regio ejus religio*, it is for the sovereign to decide the religion of his people. In some ways the Lutheran theory had its freest course in the Catholic lands, since on the whole it was they which possessed the kind of well-knit central government needed to carry Luther's principle into effect. Catholic rulers thought they saw a short and easy way to religious unity. Their temptation gained some of its force from the unreasonableness of the recalcitrant element—it is, after all, a little difficult to reason with people who deny the validity of reason. Sovereigns and their advisers impatiently shook off all attempts to persuade them to take the long, difficult road of discussion and conviction. They chose the broad and easy way of compulsion—and it landed them, as broad and easy roads are apt to, in unforeseen disaster.

For two hundred years Catholic rulers had been steadily flouting the Popes, gathering into their own hands the control and regimentation of religion in their dominions. Unhappily, they received support from important sections of their local clergy, who felt the new-fashioned claims of nationality more vividly than the age-old claims of truth. Gallicanism in France, Josephism in Austria, and kindred movements elsewhere, had gone far to make the local churches little more than departments of the civil service whose higher posts afforded a career to the ruling class. There was always enough in the way of warm currents of personal religion to prevent the River of Life from freezing right over; but genuine religion flowed more and more under the cramping, distorting ice of government control. The sovereigns might point with pride to the large measure of uniformity thus secured; but they boasted too soon. What they had

really gained was a mass of insincere religious profession to act as tinder for Voltaire. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, one of the worst of these sacrifices on the altar of nationalism, is a critical moment in this story of disobedience to the Church; for it put an end to the recatholicizing of France through public debate which had been going steadily ahead for seventy years. Far from completing the process, it brought into being powerful groups with a new hatred for religion. The religious minorities forcibly suppressed in the seventeenth century reappear in the eighteenth as implacable enemies to the very idea of a Divine revelation.

Hence the religious revolt, when it came—and it was bound to come—had two targets, one masking the other. The avowed target was the mass of perfectly genuine grievances which always pile up when religion is welded into the framework of a national economy. Subordination of Christianity to State control invariably breeds disorders of a certain type, and in the eighteenth century it bred them freely. But the second, unavowed, target was the claim of Christianity to speak for a wisdom higher than the human; the evils resulting from the Lutheranization of religion were put down to the account of revelation itself, and provided abundant cover for the attack on revealed religion. The subordination of religion to secular control deserves to be called the central factor in the eighteenth century, since all the vigorous movements were in the nature of reactions against it. But they did not always see their target clearly, or if they saw it they were too crafty to avow it. And the devout on their side were too accustomed to a situation, now several generations old, to see its essentially uncatholic character; hence there was very little in the way of a movement to free religion from this deforming control. Attackers and defenders alike assumed that the situation must either be maintained or destroyed as it stood. Religion mistress in its own house entered as little into the calculation of its friends as of its enemies.

Nor was *cujus regio ejus religio* the only infiltration of non-Catholic ideals. Piety, so much more intimate a concern than administration, had been largely moulded by the Jansenists, pro-

ducing a temper, and in some degree a doctrine, which was more Calvinist than Catholic. The Jansenist temper affected many who repudiated Jansenist doctrines. An austerity which vitalizes when it is the free choice of the few had become a blighting bleakness now it was forced upon the many. For Jansenist piety became, as individualistic piety always must, the prerogative of the well-to-do; it could flourish only in an atmosphere of leisure. Individualism had emptied it of social content in a further sense—it had ceased to understand and value those social channels by which the overburdened mass of men draw near to God. Everything that could make religion a popular possession, a light to the ignorant and the overworked, was regarded by Jansenism with contempt, as barely tolerable superstition. Active religion, in too many comfortable households, presented itself as a round of dreary—and quite selfish—observance in the service of a repellent deity. And those who were thus repelled have some excuse for failing to notice the chief thing about the Jansenist deity—that he does not exist. If Gallicanism had made religion worldly Jansenism had made it pharisaic. It is sad, though hardly surprising, that generous natures should revolt from such a hateful combination.

Unluckily, the rebels, as always, were tainted by the thing rebelled against. Systems bad enough to provoke revolt generally have their revenge in the end—since it is they which endow the rebels with their unconscious assumptions, it can trust those rebels to carry the contamination into regions which, under the bad system, had successfully remained immune. Just as Marxism erects into an explicit system the implicit assumptions of the capitalist era, so the French Revolution loosed upon secular life the principles which had already debilitated religion. It carried to their logical conclusions the assumptions of Gallican and Jansenist alike; that which had debased religion was expected to vivify politics. The atomic conception of the individual, which had worked immense harm to religion and morals, was transferred to the political and economic sphere, to embark (as we now know) on a fresh career of devastation.



This hardly became noticeable during the eighteenth century itself, since its children grew up in the matrix of an organic community; they were rooted in a forest soil, centuries deep, where organic decay fertilized each new generation. But once that organic soil was gone—and the eighteenth century diligently spaded it away as “superstition”—the individual became more and more like one of those unlucky beans strung on wire in school-room vases; he might germinate, but he had no soil to nurture him to maturity. The phenomenon was not confined to any one class; the economic rootlessness of the proletariat was only the most sensational symptom of the rootlessness of Man. Like the bean in the vase, the individual was everywhere restricted to his own resources, unable to draw on the community for either his economic or his spiritual needs. For a time this produced a one-sided growth so rapid that it fostered the myth of necessary progress. By the time experience had debunked the myth, the submature condition of all minds made it difficult to diagnose the malady correctly. The few who still had roots in an organic soil seemed to belong to a dead past, instead of to the only living hope for the future. The experience of organic community had been lost. Naturalness itself had sunk below the horizons of memory, and its place could be taken only by deliberately engineered artifice. Since, however, men had been reduced to the sub-natural and the one-sided, the sole synthesis they could devise was regimentation, a pitiful *ersatz* for organic community. Society was to be held from disruption, not from within by a living instinct, but from without by an entanglement of red tape.

The weakness of political thought in the eighteenth century sprang from its blindness to community—a blindness never since cured. And this in turn sprang from something deeper-lying; the *philosophes* had a most dangerous blindness towards instinct. The whole contribution of instinct to civilization was dismissed as “superstition.” There was thus denial in two directions; the superhuman wisdom of revelation was rejected hardly more acridly than the prehuman wisdom of instinct. Wisdom was

equated with doctrinaire rational knowledge, a blunder that would be comic if the results had been less tragic. It provoked in later generations a reaction as disastrous as the blunder itself, the attempt to live by the superhuman alone, or by the sub-human alone. Thus disintegration became complete. The sixteenth century atomized the individual in his religious and moral life; the eighteenth carried the atomization into his political concerns, the nineteenth into economics. Such is the result of trying to live by parts only of the reality open to us. And the most dangerous effect of the disease is that it blinds men to the one real cure, a return to organic community.

Naturally, then, eighteenth-century Saints had to be all their century was not. They were in opposition to it, not from one side only but from two; they challenge the Age of Reason in the name of both faith and instinct. They speak for the primal and not alone for the spiritual, for the roots as well as the fruits. In an age that required the Spirit to keep His breathings within the limits of good sense and good taste, they give themselves to be blown as leaves before His breath. The one current of warm, spontaneous emotion in the eighteenth century, as distinct from its cultus of superficial sensibility, is the religion of its Saints. Faith alone dared to be passionate where all else was well-bred.

And, naturally again, the eighteenth-century Saint could not be the growing point of the whole community—St. Benedict Joseph Labre is all but a replica of St. Francis of Assisi, save for his social effectiveness. For social effectiveness presupposes a community in touch with every level of wisdom, an integration up through instinct and reason to faith. And this difference of integration, not in the Saint but in his community, comes out in the matter of futurism. Medieval Saints, we can easily see, have something futuristic about them; in them there break surface new tendencies which mature in later generations, the unfolding life of the whole community, organically integrated. Where this wholeness and wholesomeness are lacking, Saints will still be futuristic, but in a very different way. They now become a criticism and a warning. The nearest they can come to partici-

pating in a misdevelopment is to alleviate its results—the philanthropist-saint is characteristic of ages when society has run off the rails. But Saints may be called to a more deep-thrusting testimony; instead of alleviation, their work may be to show up, in naked hideousness, the aberrations which contemporaries are hailing as new lights.

In St. Benedict Joseph Labre the work of alleviation is absent. He is pure show-up. He is the first rootless individual such as the triumph of individualism was to make a tragic commonplace. This is what the confident man-worship of the *philosophes* would end in, a world of waifs. The earth was to be filled with human driftwood, without roots in any soil or ties in any community, and so without their clue to God.

God does not intervene to force the choice of men, though He may intervene to warn of an abyss ahead. He did not forcibly check the mad plunge into individualism, but He set before men a specimen of what they were about to make. Before the drift began, He prepared and sent forth a prophetic figure, a man without roots or ties, an apocalyptic sample of coming cataclysm. But to mark His judgement on the process, He drew this waif into closest intimacy with Himself. It was man, not God, who was to cut the communication between the waif-world and the Author of the true human world. And before the last strand parted God set His seal upon these disinherited waifs. Callous indifference to their fate would be indifference to Himself—what men did to these they did to Him. St. Benedict Joseph Labre is what God thinks of the proletarian world, His compassion for its victims, His judgement on those who brought it into being.

### 3. *Childhood*

Benedict Joseph Labre was born on the 26th of March, 1748, in the village of Amettes, not far from Boulogne. He was the eldest of fourteen children, his parents being well-to-do in a countrified, hard-working way. The family traditions were devout. Several of his uncles, on both sides of the family, were

priests, typical of that upright generation of country clergy whom the Revolution hunted down like criminals.

It was a brother of his mother's who first spotted the boy's brains. Jacques Joseph Vincent was at home studying before entering the seminary, when five-year-old Benedict was sent to his grandmother's house for some reason of family convenience. Much taken with the child's quickness, the young student amused himself by teaching him to read and starting him in his Catechism. Later, Benedict did well, first at the village school, then at a more advanced school in a place called Nédon. His progress so impressed another uncle, the Abbé Labre, *curé* of Erin, that he offered to take him into his house and start him in Latin with a view to the priesthood. Benedict was then twelve and had just made his First Communion, one of his great dates. The parents hesitated a little, for he was now big enough to be useful at home, a dependable urchin who, in his quiet way, had a remarkable hold over his turbulent juniors. They would have preferred to keep him at home—after all, he was their eldest son. But on consideration they did not feel it right to stand in his way. His character and tastes pointed in the same direction as his abilities. So they accepted for him what looked like a God-sent opportunity, and let him go to his uncle, to prepare for the normal career for a bright boy of his class who was also devout.

Benedict's devoutness, it is true, was of an altogether exceptional character—though it is almost impossible to describe it without making him sound a repellent young prig. He can hardly have been that, since those who knew him were evidently as alive as ourselves to possibilities of that sort. Running through all the testimonies about his boyhood is a note of surprise; all the deponents were astonished that so pious a child should have been liked by his fellows. This is reassuring. It tells us that infant piety did not receive a ready-made welcome from the young, and that there was a critical attitude towards it on the part of responsible elders. Obviously, young Benedict had some quality which his seniors had no vocabulary to describe, but which they recognized as setting him in a class by himself. One of his school-

masters, who claimed that two thousand boys had passed through his hands, declared that he had never had another pupil like Benedict—so much so that he had gone out of his way to test the child. He had behaved as if he had a “down” on him, yet never managed to startle him into the least sign of temper or rebellion. Benedict not only remained serene; he never stopped trying his best even when, apparently, nothing he could do was right in his master’s eyes.

He was a grave little boy, with a quiet smile—he had none of the infectious good spirits or inventiveness at play which have endeared some young Saints to their schoolfellows. We only hear of Benedict as a wet-blanket on indecent conversation; if it did not wilt in his presence he did not hesitate to remonstrate, and—most strangely—the remonstrance was taken in good part. He cared nothing for amusement; when sent off by his uncle to share an outing with other young people, he would slip away at the first opportunity, find a church and set to his prayers.

God, to most people an inference or a report, was to Benedict an ever-present reality, commanding both his fear and his love. His fear indeed grew out of his love—it was his perception of God’s goodness that made the boy wince at the least breath of offence. The insight of his later years—“Men offend God because they do not know Him”—was inarticulately present from a very early age, prompting his reaction to untruthfulness, bad language and dirty talk. All these were to him so many blows at God, blows delivered blindly and carelessly because people did not see Whom they were hitting. There was nothing conventional or imitative about his protests; they were the spontaneous result of genuine vision. And the spontaneity won him a hearing which would have been refused to any mere prudery.

Years later, an Ursuline nun remembered how, a little girl of seven, she had run into the garden where Benedict was gathering strawberries, and begged for some. He sent her to ask leave of his uncle—he himself never touched anything in the garden without special permission (a rule of his own making, by the way, his uncle never dreamt of enforcing it). The child came

back with her leave, but so surprised at being sent for it that she returned to the charge: "Give me some, your uncle won't know." "God will know," was the austere answer. "What! A little thing like that!" she exclaimed. "How can it matter? It's not as if I was asking for a lot, just give me two." "How can anything be a trifle if it offends God?" was Benedict's rejoinder. "And besides, we begin with little things, then go on by degrees to bigger ones. To-day it is only a few strawberries, but soon it will be things of greater consequence. You will take a few pins one day, then a little pair of scissors, then it will begin to be bigger things still. Be sorry for making such a suggestion, and go to confess it as soon as you can." The little girl never forgot; things Benedict said had a curious way of sticking in the memory.

Another time one of the children in the parish, a girl of twelve, had stopped coming to the school. Asked why, she burst into tears and said her stepmother would not let her. Benedict was not content simply to comfort her. He led her round to the church, made her kneel down and say a *Pater* and an *Ave*, repeating "Thy will be done" three times. He explained to her that she must give herself up to the will of God, said the *De Profundis* with her for her own mother, and then returned to the question of doing the will of God. It was now her duty to obey her stepmother, therefore she must put right out of her mind the desire for more schooling and not allow it to trouble her any more. "God who is so good will make up to you for it," he told her. "I will pray for you, and you must be sure to do the will of God." Then they knelt down again and said three times, "Praised and adored for ever be the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar." The little girl went away, not petted into further self-pity, but with the roots of her trouble cleansed and her whole heart turned in a new direction.

This story causes a twinge. Educated women in particular must sympathize with the child's intellectual hunger, especially with the hint of an arbitrary and unloving home in the background. But however legitimate it is to hope, and still more to work, for the satisfaction of all hungers, of body and mind

alike, there are other considerations to keep in view. One is spiritual hunger, which is not necessarily assuaged when other longings are appeased, since it is even more fundamental. Beyond that is the issue of practicability—a hope for the unsatisfied is a pressing necessity that will be with us till the end of time, and that hope needs to be exemplified if it is to remain operative. Above all, a world without self-sacrifice is an even poorer place than a world without schools; those who put into the pool the sacrifice of their longings do more, and amount to more, than those who achieve a maximum personal development on the lines of their desires. The human tendency is always to “spend money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which doth not satisfy.” It needs to be counteracted by a strong witness the other way, that the true wisdom is to seek permanent satisfactions. The inducement which Benedict held out to the little girl—“God is so good that He will make it up to you”—is exactly that of the prophet: “Hearken diligently to Me, and eat that which is good, and your soul shall be delighted with fatness” (Isaias lv, 2). What would have spoiled her life would have been, not lack of schooling, but letting the lack so obsess her that she became unable to learn from experience. Benedict turned her back from a road whose almost certain end is neurosis. With the sure touch of an expert he went to the heart of her trouble. Instead of dismissing it as silliness or naughtiness, he took her perfectly seriously, taught her the simple yet deep lesson of surrender to God, and sent her away, no longer “eating her heart out,” but endowed with an ideal and an aim, than which there is no more vitalizing gift in the hands of men.

How came Benedict, at fifteen or sixteen, by this expert touch on human needs?

His wisdom came to him simply and directly from his prayers. God-knowledge and self-knowledge grow together, and from them proceeds a knowledge of the human heart. He who will enter into himself finds himself in God, and from that stronghold of truth he is able to enter into other lives. For to see God and self in their true proportion, the one all, the other less than

nothing, is to acquire a sense of proportion regarding all else, and so a freedom from entangling irrelevancies. He who knows his own nothingness knows too that all things owe their being to no lesser thing than Infinite Love. Following the footsteps of that Love he can penetrate another life at its most secret, most vital point, the point at which nothing is transmuted into something by the creative power of Love.

But because Love thus gives us being it has unlimited rights over us. It is only as we accord God His rights over us that we discover His Love, and the process of discovery may hold a large element of fear. So it was with Benedict in his boyhood. He was impressed by the illimitable rights of God, the impossibility of ever satisfying them, and the small number of people who even tried to fulfil this, the first law of their nature, since it is the law of their nothingness. Hence, while to the tearful little girl he dwelt on the goodness of God, to himself God was at this period largely an object of fear, that "holy and wholesome fear" which, far from crushing, energizes and ennobles the soul. For it drives the soul to seek the true Source of its being.<sup>1</sup>

Benedict's motive through these early years was simple enough—to give God His due, holding nothing back. The Creator is infinitely more interesting than His creatures; other interests had as much chance with Benedict as an arithmetic lesson with the average child when a circus is passing in the street. The people around him were decent folk, hence his awareness of God's due had for foil, not great crimes, but the small faults which respectable people so easily take for granted. Lying and swearing caused Benedict acute pain, because he saw them in their true proportion—a refusal to God of His absolute rights over His creation.

This awareness quickened in the boy both self-denial and charity—indeed, the double impulse often had but a single expression, as when he gave his dinner to some poor person.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross: "When a soul has perfectly attained to the spirit of fear she also perfectly possesses the spirit of love. The perfect fear of the child proceeds from the love it has for its father."



On the whole, though, Benedict's self-training during these years took the form not so much of outward austerity as of a great inward austerity—he held himself humble and obedient to all who had authority over him, even a bullying servant. He never took his own way, even when it was innocent.

All the same, his uncle was not quite happy about his studies. Benedict was a diligent student, but the Abbé Labre realized that somehow his heart was not in his work, so much so that at last he felt it his duty to take his nephew to task. To his great surprise, Benedict then told him that he believed God was calling him to enter one of the more austere religious Orders, and that after long pondering and study his choice had fallen on La Trappe. His uncle made all the obvious remonstrances. Benedict was too young to decide such a thing; it was probably a passing whim and he must not take it too seriously; it would grievously disappoint his parents, who had already self-sacrificingly spared him to a career of usefulness—it was too much to expect them to consent to his burying himself alive. But the boy's answers, modest, well-informed and profound, left the good Abbé thoughtful: could it be possible that the call was genuine? Bidding his nephew think and pray, the uncle closed the conference.

It was never reopened. Soon after this, an epidemic of typhus smote the village. Nearly every family in Erin was affected, and uncle and nephew were run off their feet ministering to the sick and dying. Benedict even managed to find time to tend the beasts, neglected in their stalls when a whole family was down with the disease. He himself survived, but such unstinted service was too much for the older man. The Abbé Labre sickened and died, and Benedict found himself without a home.

#### 4. *Vocation*

He remained until the epidemic had subsided, then left the village pursued by hopes that he would one day return as its parish priest. Thus he turned up in Amettes, at the age of

eighteen, with a reputation which made everyone regard him as marked out for the priesthood. His parents were worse than unprepared for his desire to enter La Trappe; they were very actively prepared for something quite different, an honourable career as the beloved pastor of a parish. Their opposition was quite as strenuous as the Abbé Labre had foreseen.

Benedict did not argue, though he made it clear that he had in no way abandoned his desire for the religious life. The quiet way he stated his case was infinitely more impressive than a spate of eloquence and entreaty. He told his parents that he could not be a priest—"I should have to fear damnation if I were to take upon myself to work for the salvation of others. God calls me to solitude." But he settled down at home as a good son, helping his parents in house and farm, yet secretly training himself for a life of hardship. He kept to the simplest food and began to spend the nights on the floor. His mother once discovered him thus lying on the bare boards, and the little talk they then had opened her eyes to the strength both of his desire and of his resolution.

His parents did not keep him at home long. Having undertaken to let him be a priest, they accepted the duty of forwarding him in his training and sent him to his mother's brother, the uncle who had taught him to read, and who was by then curate at Conteville. The Abbé Vincent and young Benedict were well matched. Both were in love with poverty and silence, and the charity which flowers from this soil. Everything in the house was at the call of any needy person. When they had given away their chairs, they were faced with the problem of how to continue their studies—sitting on heels is hardly practicable for Europeans. They solved the difficulty by digging a hole in the mud floor and sitting, book in hand, with their legs dangling into the hole!

Benedict's weariness of his books seems to have passed off at this time, for he got on "like a house on fire" under his uncle's tuition, even when, there being no servant, he did most of the housework himself. He never really cared for classical authors, or indeed for any books that were not occupied with God. The call of La Trappe sounded as clearly as ever in his heart, and when

a mission was held in his neighbourhood he took the opportunity to consult experienced priests about his vocation.

These missionaries decided that the vocation was genuine, but they felt the parents' position too. So they suggested a compromise. Instead of going to distant La Trappe, let him enter some austere house much nearer his own home. Benedict's mother had already been half-won by her boy's quiet resolve. Now that her fear of losing him completely seemed removed she gave way, and he set out with his parents' consent to offer himself to the Carthusians of Val-Sainte-Aldegonde. Alas! the monastery was in no position to receive new novices, but the superiors advised him to apply to another Carthusian house, Notre Dame des Prés, not far from Boulogne. He presented himself in the company of yet another uncle, a Canon of Wailingcourt, to be told that he was too young—he was not yet twenty. If, however, he wished to prepare himself, he could occupy the time of waiting in learning plain chant and dialectic.

Benedict's parents deserve great credit for the way they stuck to their various bargains. Just as they had done their best to educate him for the priesthood, so now they went to much trouble to find some way of carrying out this new stipulation. They placed him with the curate of Ligny-les-Aires, who had owed much to the Abbé Labre at Erin and was glad to show his gratitude. Benedict was found to have a fine singing voice and got on well with the music part of his training. But the logic was a grind, so much against the grain that it took enormous resolution to stick it out. He did, however, acquire enough for his purpose and once more presented himself at Notre Dame des Prés. This time he was accepted.

He remained only six weeks. Hardly was he within the monastery when there closed down on him a terrible spiritual darkness. The things that would have helped him, heavy manual work and severe penance, were not allowed, and though he showed himself meticulously obedient to his Rule his superiors perceived that the strain was too great. It was not God's will that he should remain in their monastery, and they sent him away.

It was a blow. Benedict, however, was upheld by the hope that God was taking this way to signify His will that he should be a Trappist after all. Spending only one night at home, he set off to walk the sixty miles to Notre Dame de la Trappe at Mortagne—to be met with disappointment. The Trappists would receive no novice under the age of twenty-four. And they were discouraging about the future. They did not think he had the health for their life. After entertaining him a few days as their guest, they too sent him away.

Benedict set out to trudge the sixty miles home with a sense that his world had collapsed about him. In this bewilderment he rallied his forces and “adored the inscrutable will of God.” His mother, seeing the state of exhaustion in which he reached home, felt sure this must be the end of his whim—he would now settle down to prepare for the priesthood again.

But he did not resume his studies. He stayed on at home, working in house and field, for a further twenty months, keeping up all his practices of self-denial and prayer, at a loss what to do, but as unable as ever to stifle the voice in his heart. At last, after consulting another priest, he asked for an interview with his Bishop, and the Bishop advised him to return to Notre Dame des Prés.

Benedict carried out the advice. But it hardly looks as if he were completely satisfied by it, for as he left home he turned back to say to his parents, with unusual emphasis: “Whatever may be the issue of this journey, we shall not meet again in this world”—an unlikely prediction had he been installed near his home. And the event justified him. Once more he was only six weeks a Carthusian novice. The same desolation descended upon him. Outwardly he was calm and friendly, as well as a model of obedience. But his superiors saw that the position was impossible. “My son,” said the prior, “we see clearly that God has not called you to our institute, you must follow the inspirations of His grace and go where He leads you.” So they sent him away in company with a servant of the monastery. But at Montreuil Benedict wrote an affectionate letter to his parents, explaining

what had happened and what he meant to do. Then, leaving the letter with the servant to deliver, he set his face once more towards Mortagne and Notre Dame de la Trappe.

The letter to his parents shows that Benedict was far from sure of his reception and had made plans in case of a refusal. All the same, it is clear that he still hoped that these misadventures were intended to confirm his original inspiration. It was a real disappointment when La Trappe refused to modify its rule concerning age of admission. They would take no one under twenty-four, and he was only twenty-one. Benedict therefore carried out the further plan he had outlined to his parents. He went on another eighty miles to the Abbey of Sept Fonts, a Cistercian house of great austerity. Here he was admitted as a novice, taking the name of Brother Urban.

For three months all went well. He was not only entirely happy in his chosen life, he was loved by all. And then the same trial returned, but in fiercer form. Besides great darkness of spirit he was tormented with scruples, so much so that for the only time in his life he withdrew from Holy Communion. This phase lasted about six weeks. But though he then returned to the Sacraments—he had refused even to go to Confession, fearing himself outside the mercy of God—the inner conflict continued. After six months in the novitiate his health broke down so completely that the monks sent him to the infirmary for the poor attached to the monastery, in order that he might have a better diet than was provided within their walls. There he was carefully nursed back to health. Meantime his superiors gave much thought to his very puzzling case, and we had better do the same.

No one doubted that Benedict had a vocation to the austere forms of the religious life. Moreover, his conduct as a novice confirmed the judgement of the various superiors who at one time or another gave him a trial. Experience gave them every ground to expect that he would settle down as an exemplary member of their community. Yet now for the third time this most hopeful candidate had become involved in interior trials which threatened his physical health, perhaps even his reason.

The blame was in no way his; he could hardly have been more docile in their hands. To complicate things yet further, they loved him. They wanted to lose him as little as he wanted to go. And yet, the Abbot of Sept Fonts came to the same conclusion as the Prior of Notre Dame des Prés: "My son, you are not destined for our monastery, God wills you elsewhere." But he gave Benedict a personal certificate which he kept to his life's end, and a letter to his parents which was never delivered.

For the monks expected him to return to Amettes, and to Amettes the Abbot wrote again some time later, a letter which seems to have reached his parents safely. Only the Infirmarian heard a murmur about Rome, though he hardly took it seriously in a man barely fit to travel. But when the sorrowful farewells were over—Benedict looked back on his noviceship days as the happiest part of his life—it was southwards that he turned. From a halt in Piedmont he wrote once more to his parents, telling them what had happened and bidding them a final farewell. After that they had no further word of him for over thirteen years, and then news came in the form of inquiries into the boyhood of a reputed saint.

All this makes extremely curious history, in outward detail perhaps without parallel. Only when we look within do we begin to find the clue. It is not very unusual for a Saint to make several false starts, running up a series of blind alleys before he discovers his true mission. At the time, these false starts look like so many complete flops. Only when the whole life is unfolded are we able to see that they were organic to the finished pattern. Through them the Saint acquired, casually and unself-consciously, the precise experience needed for his true call. But there is an even deeper meaning—through them he has been weaned from the last and most deadly danger of the spiritual life, the desire to serve God in his own way instead of in God's. To give up what is wrong for God's sake is elementary morality. To give up what is good, the very good for which one seems to have been made, to which all one's instincts, aptitudes, experiences and training seem to point—this is not only much harder,

it goes to the last dandelion taproot of self-will and self-love. God's instruments are often put through a severe apprenticeship at this point before they become attuned to His service. Benedict had been led, step by step, to strip himself of the last shreds of his confidence in himself and dependence on his own lights and his own wisdom. Only such a strenuous training could fit him for the strenuous task to which he was called—indeed, not until the training was completed could he even recognize his true call. Not one minute of this bewildering pilgrimage had in fact been wasted. Benedict went out from Sept Fonts at last, ready for the thing God wanted of him—that he should “naked follow the naked Jesus.”

And as he turned south the cloud suddenly lifted from his mind. He had seemed to himself rejected of God; his love had been thrown back at him, “returned empty”—deservedly, for as he so clearly saw, he was worth nothing at all. And then a light pierced the cloud. In a flash he knew what God was asking of him. “Like St. Alexis,<sup>1</sup> he was to abandon his country, *his kindred, ease and comfort, all that pleases or flatters the senses, to lead a new kind of life; a life most painful, most penitential. Not in a wilderness, not in the cloister; but in the midst of the civilized world; devoutly visiting the most renowned sanctuaries.*”

Henceforth to all criticisms he replied, though in gentlest tones, with the crusaders' battle-cry: DIEU LE VEUT.

### 5. *Hermit of the Roads*

Two hundred years ago it was almost as difficult as to-day to strike out an original line, in the sense of doing something completely unprecedented. Originality more often consists in making a fresh combination of existing factors, or in going back

<sup>1</sup> St. Alexis died in 417, a beggar in Rome. Legend says that he was the son of wealthy patricians who slipped away from home on the eve of his marriage, to become a sort of wandering hermit. Later he returned to Rome to live as a beggar close to his own home, and was recognized by his parents only after his death.

to something so old-fashioned that it has slipped out of memory. Benedict Joseph Labre was original in both these ways. He went right back to the fifth century, to St. Alexis, to find a model for his combination of wayfaring like a pilgrim with a hermit-like solitude and austerity. Nor were these the only precedents in his recombination. He never, so far as is known, bound himself by vows, but kept chastity, poverty and obedience for pure love's sake like the Oratorians. His affinity with the hermits was so great that several well-meaning people tried to push him into the Order of Camaldolese hermits, whose life resembled his own save in being stationary. And his likeness to St. Francis of Assisi was so marked (except for the stigmata and, as we said, for social effectiveness) that the common people gave him the same or similar nicknames. He was known through Italy as *Il Povero* or *Il Poverello*, the Poor Man, or the Poor Little Man.

This feeling for precedent, however, carries us deep into the inspiration of St. Benedict Joseph. For obviously he was not simply imitative: Yet neither was he individualistic, though his life is one of the most individual in the annals of sanctity. He was not trying for "self-expression"; what he wanted to express was the deeper vital impulses of the Body of Christ. And in order to distinguish between urges originating in himself, and urges originating in the Body of Christ, he turned to two things as touchstones. He did desire some kind of traditional precedent for his way of life, since it was obvious to his good sense that the Christ-life would hardly manifest itself in a way wholly peculiar to himself; a similar manifestation in someone else would help to show that he was moved by God and not by mere selfwill. And he regularly sought direction from priests before undertaking any step, no matter how strong his own personal impulse. Thus he kept his personal call always subordinate to the life of the Mystical Body, finding in this subordination a bulwark against selfwill, conceit, and the self-deception which they bring. For obedience to the outward order of the Church is the last safeguard of humility, since it is the acid test of our willingness to yield to God. Without this acid test there can be no full



holiness, since without humility charity is balked of its perfect growth. That is one of the chief reasons why, outside the Catholic Church, saintliness never quite matures into sainthood.

Benedict Joseph Labre did thus mature. He matured because, instead of depending on his own resources, including his own private relation to God, he depended on God as related to the whole nexus of redeemed humanity. In that New Humanity, founded by the New Adam Jesus Christ, every aspect of our human complexity receives a new supernatural significance and range within the Body of Christ. The chief marvel of St. Benedict Joseph's life lies just here—that though he cut all his natural ties he did not cut himself off from mankind. Rather he drew closer his bonds with his kind, for those bonds were now wholly supernatural. Solitary as he was, his life was strongly and deliberately social. Few have ever drawn, more instinctively as well as more consciously, on their standing as members of the Christian society. The fact that he had broken with his natural society—a thing few are called upon to do—throws into sharper relief his full relatedness to all the interconnections of the supernatural society which is the Body of Christ. In a very profound sense, Benedict owed nothing to himself. He owed everything to the Church, and rejoiced at his indebtedness.

We owe our knowledge of him almost entirely to this instinct for thrusting roots into the supernatural society. Whenever he stayed more than a day or two in a place, Benedict always put himself under the direction of a priest, taking no step without his confessor's leave. As he chose his confessors among the wisest and holiest priests, he left behind him a trail of singularly competent witnesses, to attest his extraordinary innocence, his humility, his obedience, and the tenderness of his conscience. His love of poverty was forced on their notice in another way: Benedict made it an absolute rule to accept no material help from any priest who had heard his confession.

On receiving the illumination as to his special call, Benedict's first step was to consult a learned and holy priest who, after a full and careful review of the whole situation, gave it as his opinion

that this was a genuine call from God. And this continued his habit all through his wanderings, never to follow any inward light until he had received outward confirmation through the approval of a priest of the Church.

His appearance and way of life have been outlined already. His outer garment was a grey coat, full of holes, with a short cape, and his undergarments were ragged to match. His shoes were more upper than sole; though he made his long journeys all on foot it was the most difficult thing in the world to persuade him to accept a more adequate pair of shoes. Round his neck was a large rosary, with a crucifix, and in a wallet he carried a New Testament, a breviary, and a few papers by which he was identified after his death. He walked with arms crossed on his breast, and kept his eyes cast down.

In his journeys he avoided inns, on account of the profanity to be heard there, for all loose talk caused him sharp anguish of soul. Hence he travelled by unfrequented byways, even though these carried him through deep snow which he could have avoided by keeping to the valleys. His nights he spent under a hedge, or sometimes in a bakehouse—it was exceedingly difficult to persuade him to enter a house, at least later in his career, though even then kindly people did sometimes manage to lure him into a stable. He was nearly always gone in the morning before his hosts were up, to avoid the food that would have been pressed upon him.

What made him so unwilling to accept hospitality was his sensitiveness about his unclean condition. Benedict Joseph Labre came, be it remembered, of just the sort of thrifty, well-to-do country people who are most apt to put cleanliness next to godliness, and he was himself temperamentally fastidious. The condition into which he got meant suffering to mind as well as body—and of the bodily suffering not the least was the difficulty of sleeping when harassed by insect bites. But while he never flinched from all that went with his call, he was very unwilling to involve anyone else in it. In churches, he would wait to be the last to enter the confession box; and the charitable found it nearly

impossible to get him to set foot inside their houses, to obtain a few moments' rest and relief. Yet this sensitiveness was never allowed to disturb his serenity; if men turned to stare at his rags, it was his bearing that held their attention.

That is, if they were at all perceptive. Little boys sometimes mobbed him, or even people old enough to know better. Struck on the mouth by a stone, he was seen to pick up the stone and kiss it—afterwards he told his confessor that he had never *really* had anything to suffer, and had been filled with joy at even this tiny opportunity. Once a gentleman wanted to report his tormentors to the government, but he refused: "No, let no complaint be made; what we suffer for the love of Christ Crucified is little."

Good people, if they did not torment him, at least teased him with importunate offers of help. These ranged from pressing food and clothes on him to trying to get him a post as a gentleman's servant, or pushing him into a religious community of some kind. Especially in early years his youth added to his difficulties—the devout were not at all ready to swallow the idea of a young man taking to beggary when he was strong enough to work (or would be if he could be persuaded to eat a little more). Gifts, beyond the minimum needs of the moment, Benedict steadfastly refused, or if refusal was impossible he accepted them only to give them away a few minutes later. Proposals to find him a job he carried to his confessor; and though more than one priest took a share in trying to set him up in a respectable line of life, one and all ended by coming round to Benedict's view—his way of life was God's choice for him, and he could not leave it without disobeying God.

One thing lies in the background of his life, and perhaps helped to make it possible—Italy in the eighteenth century was richly equipped in institutions to help the poor. So much so that an English sea-captain, ashamed to think how little wealthy London did in comparison with quite unimportant Italian towns, went home to build the Foundling Hospital, in imitation of what he had seen in Italy. Everywhere there were hospitals for the

sick poor, convents where a dole of food was made at certain hours, hospices where poor people could spend the night, refuges for old age, street preachings to impart to the poor the doctrines of their faith. Benedict at different times made use of many of these services. Soon after leaving Sept Fonts he fell ill and had to go into a hospital in North Italy. When no other alms came his way he attended at convent gates, where soup was handed out, taking his place last in the line so that if anyone went short it should be he. (Once, another poor man snatched his basin from his hand and poured the soup into his own, to run off laughing under the objurgations of the distributing monk!) And when someone suggested that he attend the street preachings for the instruction of the poor, Benedict meekly complied, though they were not meant for people who had made studies in theology, let alone for those who had his spiritual wisdom won in prayer. Indeed, he gave offence by keeping on the edge of the crowd—this was before he became well known in Rome. Some thought him proud when he was only avoiding contacts that might have “given something” to other people. At that time in Rome a really dirty or ill-dressed poor person was practically never seen; people were not in the way of making allowance for Benedict’s kind of troubles, even in the most needy.

For the most part, however, he slept in the streets, in church porches or on the bare ground. When the weather was very bad he had, in Rome, two lairs, a hole in the wall of the Quirinal, and another in one of the arches of the Colosseum—he loved the Colosseum for the sake of the martyrs who had suffered there. Towards the end of his life, however, his confessor asserted his authority to make Benedict get under cover at night. Hence in Rome he spent his nights in a hospice for the poor, though he would never use the bed assigned to him, but slept on the floor. And at Loretto the priest in charge of the French pilgrims more or less forced him to go to an innkeeper, Gaudenzio Sori, who, with his wife Barbara, became as nearly intimate friends as any he had in the world.

6. *Meetings by the Way*

In a sense, the longer he lived the more solitary he grew, for he learned the necessity for avoiding contacts if he was to avoid esteem. In earlier days, he once or twice stayed long enough with people to make a very profound impression—fleeing however as soon as he realized what the impression was. That anyone should think him a Saint filled him with horror, for he was convinced that he was the basest of men.

In 1771, when he had followed this strange life for over a year, he made his second visit to Loretto, and on his way back to Rome he made a detour to visit the shrine of St. Romuald at Fabriano. A church of St. James in the city proved an even stronger attraction, inspiring his pilgrimage to Compostello, in Spain, the longest of his journeys. At first, however, Benedict lingered in Fabriano, never dreaming how his devout bearing had caught attention. True, the parish priest of St. James had not only tried to relieve his wants but had let him serve Mass, a privilege which Benedict valued above anything else on earth. He stayed on very happily, making his confession to the kind priest, Don Maria Pagetti, without an idea of the whisper that was going round the town—"That poor man is a Saint." All unsuspecting, he accepted the invitation of a good woman, Vincenza Rocca, to take refuge in her house one afternoon from the rain.

Vincenza soon drew him into talk. He had come in saying "Praised be Jesus Christ," and his hostess, taking courage, began to speak to him of her troubles. Benedict answered so simply and directly that what some would call platitudes flamed into life in his words: "He brought under her consideration the . . . infinite goodness of God and His fatherly Providence; the wrong which we do to God by not casting our cares upon Him, who is a Father of infinite love." Much moved, she called her children and begged him to speak to them too. This he did, with a manner so earnest and loving that they never forgot. Characteristically,

he made much of sins of the tongue: "If they wished to be children of Jesus Christ, they must be very careful never to tell lies or be disobedient, that they must live always in the fear of God." As usual, it sounds nothing out of the way, we have all heard the same till we are bored to extinction. But as Benedict said it, commonplace flowered into vital truth till Vincenza, feeling that she could not keep such treasures to herself, ran to the house of a friend, Virginia Fiordi, who for nine years had been bedridden with some painful disease.

Next day, the Feast of St. John the Baptist, Benedict looked in again on the kindly Rocca household, and was promptly taken round to see the sick woman. The very sight of him uplifted her heart and did her more good, she declared, than anything that had happened to her. She insisted on his dining with her, which he did, and she was intensely struck by his abstemious eating. When they talked, he said to her no more than any instructed Christian might have said—he told her simply that God was preparing for her "an immense weight of eternal glory" and that her sufferings were a privilege since they were to prepare her for so high a destiny. Virginia was a devout soul who had genuinely resigned herself to the Will of God. But Benedict lifted the whole issue from the dreary level of resignation to an inscrutable decree to that of warm, glad co-operation with the designs of love. Truly, as he said on another occasion, "in the conversation of Jesus there is no bitterness, nor in His company any tediousness, but joy and gladness." And the servant, having conversed much with his Lord, had caught something of His power of touching all to life with the rays of the Divine love. For "Christ has turned all our sunsets into sunrises," as Clement of Alexandria said long ago. When Benedict left the house, the bleak landscape of the sick woman's life was shining in the light of the newly risen Sun. Nor did it set for her again.

This and other incidents show how easy it would have been for Benedict to make and keep friends, to become perhaps the pet holy man of some devout household. But if he were to obey his call he must forgo even this, never again risking the happy ties

of friendship. . . . So three days later he stole out of Fabriano, never to return. The story had gone the rounds, and the result was a new respect in the demeanour of those he met. Not here could he be overlooked, despised, conformed to the likeness of Christ. He shouldered his wallet and slipped away before anyone was awake. But when word of his death came, eleven years later, his memory was still vivid in the hearts he had set on fire.

Contacts as detailed as this are rare in his life, and grow rarer as he took precautions against them. One or two occurred, very similar in character, during his long tramp across France to Spain. Another, after his return to Italy, offers a touch of variety in a life that is curiously monochrome, at least when imprisoned in the bricks and mortar of words.

On his way to Loretto one spring he stopped utterly exhausted in a small town and, leaning against a wall, said the *De Profundis*. His French accent caught the ear of a passing priest. Don Santucci was trying to learn French, and an idea occurred to him—perhaps this poor man would trade a few French lessons for food and help. He invited the ragged wanderer to his house. The man at first refused, but the priest fell back on his authority—those who dealt with Benedict soon learned to take him on the side of religious obedience, for he was impregnable from every other.

Indoors, the priest drew from him his story, for like everyone else he wondered how a young man of education came to be in such a state of destitution. Don Santucci proposed to exchange food for French lessons—but the guest refused: he was pushing on to Loretto and did not wish to delay his journey. At last, he consented to wait a few days, during which the priest's friends were much shocked at the riffraff he was entertaining; they were sure he was being taken in by an impostor. Don Santucci's impressions were very different—he was astonished that one so needy would accept so little, barely enough to keep him in life; he had to exert pressure to get him to spend the night in a shelter for poor people. Even more astonishing was his spiritual wisdom; they read sermons together, and the beggar's comments

showed a profundity of thought and experience which amazed the priest. After his first explanations, Benedict refused to speak of his past at all, save of the happy days as a novice at Sept Fonts. By the exercise of considerable ingenuity—Don Santucci discovered how Benedict loved to serve Mass and was abashed at his devotion—he induced his visitor to stay for ten days. Then, very reluctantly, he let him go. The parting was affectionate, but final. For long Don Santucci watched and waited, hoping his visitor would return. When he was transferred to Rome some years later he relaxed his vigilance, for he gave up hope of ever seeing him again. And then one day the whole city was talking of the death of a beggar-saint, a well-known figure whom Don Santucci had happened never to see. He went to pay his respects to the dead—and recognized the French pilgrim who had so won his reverence and his love.

At first Don Santucci was rather hurt that Benedict had deliberately avoided him. When he understood that it was the sacrifice of a valued friendship, because it was valued, he was comforted. . . . Are we? For this is perhaps the most troubling thing in this troubling story, more upsetting even than Benedict's lousiness. We can allow that our disquiet is in part a disturbance of what is facile, shallow and hidebound in our thinking. But here the angel—if it be an angel—is troubling deep waters indeed. And we do not at once find a new power of healing in the spring.

Why did Benedict act like this? Why did he refuse himself the least gratification, not only of his senses but of his very strong human affections? That he had "a genius for friendship" is surely obvious. Yet he sacrificed it as ruthlessly as his physical fastidiousness. And the first answer is even more upsetting than the question. Benedict acted like this on a call from God. God, then, is involved in this ruthlessness. What sort of God is this, who calls a creature to separate itself from the very needs which He Himself implanted in its nature?

The beginnings of a further answer lie in Benedict's own life, in the way his experience passed from fear to love. There was a



strong element of fear in his youthful attitude to God, a fear fed indeed by love, since his horror of offending God sprang from his insight into that Love which men stabbed and wounded in sheer careless indifference. Moreover, he never came to have that delight in the human which characterizes certain Saints, notably the thinker-Saints like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. To Benedict, God was never one whose "delight is with the sons of men." He saw this world always as a vale of tears, a painful preparation for eternal joys. If he risked all he had on a single throw of the dice, that "all" never appeared to himself so very worth while.

And yet, few have come to live more simply and sweetly in the love of God than Benedict Joseph Labre. That love was mediated to him day by day by the street refuse which met his needs, needs computed so low that the gifts of his fellow-mortals seemed unnecessarily generous, a very image of the Divine generosity which never let him down. His inner life was a jealously guarded secret. But certain of his confessors extracted enough to make sure that he attained an intimacy with God so close as to be the highest sort of union with Him which is possible during our life on earth.

The first step in our comfort, then, is this: that God, if He asked great sacrifices, also comforted His servant, and that not only in Heaven but right here on earth. In the midst of his most painful pilgrimage, Benedict himself never doubted that the Pearl of Great Price was worth all he was giving for it. We are not dealing with a disappointed man—it is not the Saint who needed reassurance about God, it is ourselves. In his own view, he was one who had received good measure, pressed down and running over, filling him with thankfulness and joy.

But that does not take us the whole way. If God is as good as Benedict believed, how could He ask from anyone the life that Benedict lived?

Because men were just about to force on multitudes a life of equal misery, but without Benedict's spiritual insight to sustain them. Running ahead of men's stupidity—never more stupid

than when they think themselves wise with new wisdom—God chose a human partner whom He inflamed with His Divine love. Benedict was God's beacon, a warning and an illumination, to turn men from their foolish ways in time. Or if they would not turn, he was to bring light and comfort to the derelict world which their self-confidence was about to create. If the eighteenth century had run after Benedict instead of after Rousseau—they are more or less contemporaries, as St. Paul of the Cross is contemporary with Voltaire—Europe would not to-day be in the throes of dissolution. In either case, the Saint whom God raised up is a comment on the leader whom men preferred to follow.

And that comment is in part a comment on the new cult of hygiene which was then springing up. In the seventeenth century the court of *le Roi Soleil* was as dirty as a hovel, for all its external splendour; the wig was a first effort at delousing, and, to start with, an aristocratic privilege. It made, that is, a sharp distinction between those who could afford to be clean and those who could not, and so threatened the human dignity which is the birthright of every human soul. Since then, the disfranchisement of the dirty has gone on apace. . . . Now, hygiene is a good thing, but not the best thing. And if this good thing is used as a barrier to cut off human beings from their human rights, then God may be expected to protest. There is room in the modern world for a strong protest on behalf of those dispossessed in the name of Hygeia, put outside the human pale on account of an extrinsic misfortune which ought not to count against their full human status. That protest was delivered by Benedict Joseph Labre.

Not, of course, that there is anything holy about the louse. But there can be something very unholy about men's attitude to the lousy. The outcry about evacuated children at the beginning of the present war is a case in point. There was violent indignation at the invasion of clean houses by the army of the unclean; for the homes from which the children came not one word of self-condemnation. There was no anger at the outrage on the children; all sense of outrage was on behalf of

those now brought face to face with the fruits of their own philosophy of life. Our own evacuees are the living evidence that St. Benedict Joseph Labre has a challenge for the twentieth century as much as for the eighteenth.

### 7. *Loretto and Rome*

As Benedict's strength waned he became less and less able for the long journeys of his earlier pilgrimage. More and more his life turned on two centres: Rome—"Belle Rome, saint ville," as he hailed the soil hallowed by the martyrs—and the Holy House of Loretto.

In Rome he is chiefly associated with the church of Santa Maria dei Monti, where in course of time he became a familiar sight. He was also diligent in visiting other holy places in the city and in performing the devotions with reverence and fervour. Not that he let his devotion disturb other people. Indeed, there was one occasion when he rebuked a woman who was parading her fervour with sighs and groans not at all to the taste of her neighbours, who were most grateful for his intervention. He himself knelt upright hour after hour in perfect stillness, even when he had soft tumours on his knees which must have caused exquisite anguish. Sometimes in the noon hour, when he had the church to himself, since everyone else had gone to dinner, he allowed his fervour to find vent in movements and exclamations—as was ascertained by peeping sacristans, too awestruck to let him know that he was watched.

Incidentally, Benedict was capable of dealing sufficiently severe snubs, so that people who tried to manage him for his good learned to sheer off. This, however, was reserved for interference. In general, his intercourse was characterized by gentleness and a quick eye for other people's comfort. His fellow beggars, for instance, were amazed at the help they received from this poorest member of their band. Women who begged his prayers were sometimes hurt that he acknowledged the request without words and without looking up at the speaker—they did

not know that for years he was harassed by temptation and that his downcast eyes were in part a defence of his chastity. Motherly efforts to make him more comfortable thus added to his misery. Towards the end of his life, however, this temptation left him, and then his downcast looks were simply a defence of the solitude in which he lived with God. What impressed him most was men's sheer ingratitude to God. "O Lord, if men knew Thee they would not offend Thee," was the cry of his heart. "We offend God because we do not know His goodness; he who knows God does not commit sins."

Artists too sometimes importuned him to sit for them; his beautiful hands, the set of his head on his shoulders, the grace and dignity of his bearing, the grave sweetness of his expression—these caught their eye and tempted their pencil. But he only once proved persuadable. Any request based on admiration—the beauty of his hands for instance—he repelled as flattery. A young French artist, however, once succeeded by making his request as an entreaty for help—would not Benedict help out a fellow-countryman in need of a model for a work of devotion? Benedict felt unable to refuse, and submitted to a single sketch. But he would accept no fee and after that carefully dodged all further engagements.

The happiest time of his year was his annual pilgrimage to Loretto. After one or two visits of exploration, so to speak, he made it his habit to spend Holy Week at the Holy House, though this took him through snow-choked passes of the Appenines. On his first visit, he attracted the attention of the priest in charge of the French pilgrims, Père Joseph Marie Temple, who made one of the longest and most searching of the various examinations to which Benedict was submitted. These conversations entirely convinced Père Temple. It was always those who knew most about Benedict who were most convinced of the reality of his call and of his holiness.

In one of his later visits a priest at Loretto, Don Gaspare Valeri, seeing that he fainted from sheer weakness and learning that he had no shelter, insisted on his going to an inn near the

church, a little place kept by a delightful couple, Gaudenzio Sori and his wife Barbara. They would have liked to show him honour, but found he would not accept even necessities. They gave in about his sleeping in the stable instead of in the bedroom they prepared for him, but were properly horrified over his food. Quick-witted Barbara, however, found a way out. She went to Don Valeri and begged him to order their guest to eat whatever was put before him. The ruse succeeded.

Not that Barbara rode roughshod over Benedict. She managed him successfully because, more than almost anyone else, she truly entered into the spirit of his life. With the Soris, he found, he could be himself. They respected his ideal of poverty and acquiesced in his love of silence. Because they were willing to meet him on his own plane and let him follow his call without fuss, he was able to enter into a measure of intimacy with them which he achieved with no one else. Barbara's farewell at their first parting sealed the bargain: "You see, we treat you without ceremony, just as a poor man," she said. It was the right note. He returned to her year after year.

At the end of his eleventh visit (not to the Soris, to Loretto) they let him go, as usual, with regret. "You will return next year without fail?" Barbara asked him. His answer was a smile: "And if I do not, we shall meet again in Paradise." And this time he parted from Gaudenzio with eloquent thanks, contrary to his usual silence. Others got similar hints. "You will come again next year?" asked a French priest. "*Mon père*," replied Benedict, "I am going to my country." "But you will take Loretto on the way?" said the Frenchman, for he thought the pilgrim was planning a journey which would take him to France. Benedict shook his head very slightly: "I am going to my country," he said again, "I am going to my country." . . . But they did not understand.

Next year the Soris were on the lookout as usual. Palm Sunday came and no Benedict. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, still no Benedict. "Never mind, last year he came on Thursday," said Barbara. But her little boy of six piped up, "Benedict is

not coming here, he has gone to Paradise." Barbara thought he had picked up some rumour in the town. But the news had not got so far as Loretto, indeed it was not known in Rome till the evening of the day on which the child spoke.

That day, Wednesday in Holy Week, the 16th of April, 1783, a butcher named Zaccarelli was passing the church of Santa Maria dei Monti at nine o'clock in the morning. He saw a pitiful figure drag itself out of the doors of the church and fall upon the steps. Zaccarelli, a devout man who knew Benedict well by sight, for he frequented the same churches, recognized him, as did others who hastened to his help. But the others pestered him with questions: "Was he not very ill? Had he not better let them take him to a hospital?" Zaccarelli saw that the sick man was beyond decisions and took charge with authority: "You must let me take you to my house," he stated plainly. And Benedict as clearly replied: "Yes, to your house I am willing to go."

So Zaccarelli took command, and willing hands lifted the emaciated figure. They brushed aside his wish to be laid on the floor, and put him—for the first time for thirteen years—in a comfortable bed. Benedict was already sinking into lethargy. The priest, when he came, could not give him Viaticum for he had lost consciousness. So he gave him Extreme Unction, and the Fathers of Penitence came to say the prayers for the dying round his bed. All through the day people dropped in to gaze on the still form with its wonderful air of peace. In the evening, as the bells of Santa Maria Maggiore rang out for the *Salve Regina*, Benedict suddenly and without struggle ceased to breathe. And a flock of children scattered through Rome crying, "The Saint is dead! The Saint is dead!" so that many felt the news had been brought to them by the bells.

## A SIGN TO BE SPOKEN AGAINST

ST. GEMMA GALGANI, 1878-1903

### 1. *Getting Under Way*

IT is trying enough for middle-aged ladies to leave their country home to take charge of a brother's motherless children. It is something more than trying when the brother dies bankrupt, so that the family income is transformed into liabilities impossible to meet. Such were the trials which faced the spinster sisters of Enrico Galgani, late chemist of Lucca, when their brother's death, in 1897, saddled them with responsibilities which there was nothing to meet. From affluence they were suddenly reduced to indigence. To add to their anxieties, the children's mother had died of consumption, as had one of their brothers; there was no counting on robust constitutions to meet the strains of poverty. Nor was their task lightened by their eldest nephew, whose morose anger at destitution was apt to express itself in taking it out of other members of the household.

Luckily, their eldest niece, a girl of eighteen, was a standby in this difficult time, for her flawless unselfishness could be trusted to smooth over any kind of family scene. Gemma was the one bright spot in a darkly perplexing situation. Her complete freedom from self-pity, or indeed any kind of self-occupation, made her the prop of the distressed household. Her abnegation was so constant that it was taken for granted; it was just Gemma's way not to be hungry when there happened to be any food—so convenient when commons were short and the boys' appetites long. Her aunts leaned on her like the rest. Whatever troubles awaited them, none need be anticipated from that quarter.

Judge then of their horror one Friday morning when Gemma came to one of them with outstretched arms and covered hands. "Auntie," she said timidly, "see what Jesus has done to me." Examining her hands, her aunt found in each a bleeding wound,

about half an inch in diameter, which had wrenched apart bones, muscles and skin, leaving in the palm a curious protuberance the shape of a nail. Later, when precise observations were made, this was found to be of flesh, though hard. In the feet were similar wounds, that in the right foot being larger than the one in the left, as if one foot had been placed over the other and both secured by a single nail. On her right side was a crescent-shaped wound about two inches from point to point of the moon's horns. Gemma had received the Stigmata.

These lacerations recurred for three years, opening regularly every Thursday evening, remaining open about twenty hours, then closing on the Friday afternoon. They burst open within about five minutes, sometimes inwards from without, sometimes opening from within outwards. They were thus not the commoner "psychological" stigmata, in which there is profuse bleeding but only an apparent wound, no real rending of the membranes, bones and flesh. Gemma's stigmata were of the uncommon type in which the wounds are, by every surgical test, actual perforations of the living tissues of the body. Nor were these her only wounds; she also bore the marks of the scourging and of the crowning with thorns. These occurred, like her stigmata, while she was in ecstasy. But while in her normal state of consciousness she had several recurrences of a profuse bloody sweat, brought on by hearing blasphemous words. She also shared in the dereliction of Our Lord; towards the close of her life she was, for many months, without the sweet sense of the Divine Presence which had previously upheld her. And for all these mysterious sufferings she had been carefully prepared from her earliest years.

At the same time, Gemma Galgani was an intelligent, capable girl, healthy and hardworking up to the last year of her life, a centre of harmony in every household which she entered. If she was neurotic or hysteric, she showed none of the character-defects always found in such cases, for she was extremely well-balanced, self-effacing and of sound judgement. These strange manifestations apart, Gemma was entirely sane and dependable,



one on whom weaker natures leaned and to whom the puzzled turned for advice.

It required, of course, several years to make and verify these observations. We shall go into that shortly. In the meantime, let us return to Gemma and her aunt, to whom the first impression was sheer shock. Gemma had realized, as her words show, that the doer of this strange thing was Our Lord. She had, in fact, been warned that she was chosen to suffer, though not of the actual course of events. In her first perplexity, she concluded that the stigmata must be the result of the vow of virginity which she had taken—everyone who gave himself or herself to Jesus must have received these marks, though she had happened never to hear of it before. The last thing to occur to her was that it could be peculiar to her unimportant self.

Long before she was eighteen, Gemma Galgani had been called to the higher paths of prayer. As a mystic, be it said, her development was completely normal, "according to book" even, though she was quite unacquainted with the books. She received only the ordinary teaching on devotion given to school-children and to congregations; yet all untaught she followed point by point the path of the great mystics, with far less of personal variation than some. This conformity to type is a feature of her case, interesting because of its perfect spontaneity. One such normality is that the early stages are studded with phenomena, sometimes "locutions," that is, distinctly heard inner voices, at others what she calls "clear lights," a wordless but perfectly definite communication in the deeps of her soul. It was by means of such a locution that Our Lord had prepared Gemma for the frightening development which lay ahead, yet without telling her exactly what to expect. He asked for a generalized surrender to His call for a victim.

"My child," He said to her, "I have need of victims, and strong victims. In order to appease the just wrath of My Divine Father, I need souls who, by their sufferings, tribulations and difficulties, make amends for sinners and for their ingratitude. Oh! that I could make all understand how incensed My Heavenly

Father is by the impious world! There is nothing to stay His Hand, and He is now preparing a great chastisement for the world."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *Background*

Anyone whose memory goes back to the closing years of last century or the opening years of our own will know how astonishing these words would have sounded to contemporaries, especially to the young. The young people of that period had the sense of being born into a world stuffily settled and at peace. All the great deeds had been done, all the hazards had been faced, all the risks were a story of the past. The enthusiasm which greeted the outbreak of war in 1914 shows how pathetically youth was everywhere eating its heart out, oppressed with the sense that no great deeds awaited it. Nothing was less foreseen than that the twentieth century would offer an occasion of heroism such as time had never before demanded.

Moreover, this smothering atmosphere of unbreakable peace was regarded by most people as an entirely moral and superior state of affairs. The world had become virtuous—and the result was the stifling atmosphere of a hothouse. Had Gemma's "locution" been broadcast when it was new, the youth of the world would have shrugged it aside as, in a sense, too good to be true. The promise of a more adventurous prospect would have been discounted by the accompanying moral condemnation. Mankind had become good; and there was no using kicking against the resulting boredom. Anyone who said God was displeased with the century was clearly nuts.

This is the background against which we must visualize Gemma if we would get the full force of her story. She was a young girl of the comfortable classes to whom a good education was as much a commonplace as sufficient food. She moved among decent well-behaved people, and though she was compassionate to the poor she never seems to have regarded the

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Gemma Galgani*, by Fr. Germanus of St. Stanislaus, p. 189.

existence of poverty as a condemnation of the whole social order; she saw no further than personal efforts at relief. Her father's death and bankruptcy, it is true, plunged her through the thin crust on which the century was walking and gave her experience of its cruel side. But she did not draw the conclusion that to us seems obvious. She was, in her ordinary judgements, a child of her own times, and we must be careful not to read into her story the preoccupations of our own. Gemma took the nineteenth century for granted, as we take the twentieth. And across this uncritical acceptance, normal to protected girls in every period, there shoots this extraordinary intimation: in God's sight this virtuous period is "an impious world" for which He is preparing "a great chastisement."

Nor was Gemma's reaction what our taste would expect. Incredible as it seems, she showed no curiosity about the threatened chastisement. She fastened at once upon what Jesus asked from herself, without speculating about other people. "What is that to thee?" Our Lord had once said to another speculator, "follow thou Me." Gemma, already intimate with Jesus, acted by instinct upon these words. "I am the victim and the Jesus the sacrificing Priest!" she exclaimed. "Act quickly, O Jesus! All that Jesus wills, I desire; everything that Jesus sends me is a gift."<sup>1</sup>

But reflection brought afterthought, not about the substance of what was asked her but about its time. Gemma realized that any exceptional suffering could not, given her home, be kept private. She had long wanted to be a nun. Now it seemed to her that Our Lord *must* want her to secure the privacy of a convent before carrying out His plans for her. She therefore offered a carefully thought-out prayer which she subsequently sent to her director for his approval:

"Behold me at Thy most Sacred Feet, dear Jesus, to pour forth my acknowledgement and gratitude for the repeated favours Thou hast granted me. I thank Thee; but I want yet another grace, O my God, if pleasing to Thee; wait, Jesus, wait;

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 189.

I am Thy victim, but wait. My life is in Thy hands, but wait; Thou canst use me as Thou wilt, but wait, if it please Thee. May Thy Holy Will be done in all things."

Judged by any ordinary standard, this is an extraordinary degree of abandonment to the will of God. It is only by the standard that Gemma was later to attain that this looks still childish and immature. A day was to come when Gemma would make no pleas or conditions over what Jesus asked of her, even when He withdrew His presence from her, abandoning her to a dereliction like His own on the Cross. There is a long road ahead of her, and the first step is—Jesus refused her request. He did not wait. The Stigmata came upon her with painful embarrassment in her difficult, overcrowded, unsympathetic home.

The want of sympathy would not have mattered. It was in any case partial; only one of her aunts was hostile. But this merely made her a bone of contention between them. The real evil of Gemma's home was the lack of privacy. Had she remained there she would have been subjected to a most unfortunate publicity, in which people would have talked without waiting to observe. She would have been exposed both to persecution and to uncritical veneration. Her instinct was sound. If she was to be a victim, not a centre of gossip, privacy was essential. And as a matter of fact it was provided, though not in a convent. Gemma never became a nun.

There lived in Lucca a respectable well-to-do family of the name of Giannini. The father was a knight, though to call him and his wife Sir Matthew and Lady Giannini would not give quite the right atmosphere, for they were simpler in their habits and more involved in business than the English titles suggest. There were eleven children, all under twenty, and completing the household was the knight's unmarried sister, Cecilia Giannini, a woman as sensible as she was devout. And Cecilia's clear head and warm heart told her the same thing—at all costs Gemma Galgani must be rescued from her home. She moved very circumspectly, however, first making the excuse of the family's

absence to invite Gemma to spend the day with her as her companion. The days lengthened to include nights, and Cecilia became so attached to her visitor that she proposed to her brother and sister-in-law to take the girl into their household altogether. This appealed to the warm-hearted Gianninis, who cheerfully tacked the chemist's daughter on to their own brood. Gemma's aunts felt it would be wrong to refuse, in view of the family destitution, though she was the member of their own household whom they could least spare. After due negotiations, Gemma went, in September 1900, to make her home permanently with the Gianninis. Cecilia became to her a second mother—*mamma mia*—and in the children she found a troop of affectionate brothers and sisters. One of the girls, Euphemia, became Gemma's closest friend and confidante.

Among the most astonishing things in the story is the attitude of the young Gianninis. The embarrassing generosity of their elders does not always command the heartfelt acquiescence of the young, who can easily be critical or sub-acid or even openly resentful. The mother, Signora Giustina, seems to have realized the possibilities as clearly as any sensible woman would, judging by her emphatic statement that her fears had not been fulfilled. "I am able to declare on oath," she said, "that during the three years and eight months that Gemma was with us, I never knew of the least trouble arising in our family on her account; and I never noticed in her the least defect. I repeat, not the smallest trouble, not the smallest defect."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *The Chief Witnesses*

Gemma's position, a mixture of child of the house, poor dependent and mother's help, was not without its difficulties. Beyond that were the embarrassments created by her ecstasies. Her tact in effacing these as much as she could counted for much in making her a harmonious member of the household. On her side, her gratitude for the tact and protection of her new

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 101.

guardians took the form of working most industriously at the domestic tasks assigned to her. Not that she was made a drudge or in the smallest way exploited. She worked with the ladies of the family, and it was entirely her own choice to take on some of the rougher tasks generally left to the servants, such as drawing water from the well. If the Gianninis interfered at all, it was to make her sit down when they did and take some recreation. But it is important to remember that during these three years when she was undergoing a weekly crucifixion Gemma pulled her full weight in the housework. She was good at amusing the little ones, adapted herself with apparent ease to other people, and soon became the recognized sick-nurse when anyone was laid up.

Cecilia Giannini—*mamma mia*—is thus one of the most important witnesses in the strange story of Gemma Galgani, for she had the girl under her care for about four years, often sharing a room with her and always having access to her during her ecstasies. The older and more responsible of the young people shared in this surveillance, helping to take notes and keep records, and of course adding their testimony to that of the level-headed Cecilia. During her ecstasies, for instance, Gemma held long conversations with Our Lady and Our Lord, whose replies were of course inaudible to the watchers. Her words were taken down as they were uttered, and afterwards she was asked to give an account of the whole conversation of which one side had been thus recorded. In this way it was possible to test, over a period of years, the accuracy and sincerity of her mind. If she had shown any deviation in her later account the written record would have shown it up at once. The fact that she always gave a faithful account of her side in the conversation, joined to her habitual truthfulness in everyday matters, made it natural to believe her when she reported the unheard speakers.

The Gianninis carried out this long series of observations punctually and accurately for four years, during more than three of which Gemma was an inmate of their house. The intelligence with which they executed their task is, however, in part due to someone else, Father Germanus of St. Stanislaus, an expert in

mystical matters, who was Gemma's director and first biographer, and who told them exactly what he wanted them to do. So much depends on his evidence that we must take stock of Father Germanus that we may know what kind of man he was and what were his qualifications for the work he did and the opinions he reached.

Father Germanus was a Passionist, member, that is, of an Order founded in the eighteenth century by St. Paul of the Cross to spread devotion to the Passion of Christ. The Passionists are great givers of missions; as we shall see, a Passionist mission in Lucca brought Gemma to a turning-point in her career. Father Germanus, however, had other characteristics. He was a specialist in mystical theology and had also made a close study of several other stigmatists whose cases are very fully recorded. By way of obtaining a criterion he had studied in detail the most modern authorities on hysteria, hypnotism and spiritualism, and so was enabled to establish the tests whereby to detect genuine mystical phenomena among the superficially similar phenomena which occur in other connections. His interest was purely scientific, for he was a cold-natured man with a temperamental distrust of all emotionalism and abnormality.

Naturally he was much called in by priests who had puzzling cases to direct. In this way he had acquired a wide first-hand experience of pseudo-mystics, and as a matter of fact had come to believe that such people are practically always fraudulent or diseased or neurotic or a mixture of all three. He was the last person in the world to be impressed by strangeness as merely strange, and his first advice to Gemma's confessor in Lucca was to put her on "the ordinary way for souls" and keep her there.

Familiarity breeds contempt, for marvels as for anything else, even when the marvels are substantiated. Let anyone read through the three hundred or so *grands malades* cured at Lourdes and notice how soon he starts yawning. The solidity of the evidence promotes boredom, for nothing is more monotonous than solid evidence. Few people are more contemptuous of miracle reports in general than those who have waded through

the evidence for true miracles; and few are less likely to give the benefit of the doubt to the true mystic than a man who is exposing false mystics as part of his working routine. Such was the formidable personage whom Gemma was bidden by Our Lord to take as her director.

That Gemma received this order in a vision did her no service with Father Germanus. If anything, it made him more suspicious of her. Neither was he impressed that she should know his name, age, character and appearance. Things that can be accounted for as telepathy give no guarantee of Divine communication. He disregarded her first letters, though he kept them—the case was also being referred to him by responsible people, such as the Auxiliary Bishop of Lucca, who had been Gemma's confessor from childhood. Father Germanus probably knew that he would be forced to take the case up sooner or later, and therefore kept the evidence. Perhaps too he was a little struck at some sentences in the letters: "I have to write such strange things that even you will wonder at them . . . impossible things. I say impossible, because Jesus has never spoken, never appeared to those among His servants whose souls are as sinful as mine." And in another letter: "My father, before you go on reading, I beg you in charity not to believe what I say; I act only through obedience or else I would not write another word. He [Jesus] said to me: 'My child, thou mayest write to thy father [Germanus] that the Confessor [the Auxiliary Bishop aforementioned] would willingly correspond with him. Do this. It is My will.' . . . I was continuing to speak, but it seemed to me that Jesus (or perhaps my imagination) would not let me finish, and He said to me: 'This is My will, that the Confessor henceforward make known everything to thy father.'"<sup>1</sup>

Father Germanus's collection of pseudo-mystics cannot have contained many who were so worried about their sins or so aware that the whole thing might be imagination. Nor are pseudo-mystics as a class particularly scrupulous about obedience. There was enough here to strike a trained mind as anomalous,

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, pp. 112, 113.



but not enough to make Father Germanus sure that the thing deserved investigation. It took an order from his superiors to send him to Lucca, soon after Gemma was established with the Gianninis, to stay in the house and give her the once-over.

What happened must be told in his own words:

"It happened to be a Thursday, and about the middle of supper Gemma, feeling the signs of coming ecstasy, rose from the table and left the room. After a little time her adopted mother [Cecilia Giannini] came to call me. I followed her and found the child in ecstasy. The subject of the ecstasy was the conversion of a sinner and the form was a wrestling between the blessed maiden and the Divine Justice to obtain 'this conversion. I confess that I never beheld anything more affecting. The dear child was sitting on her bed with her eyes, face and all her person turned towards a part of the room where Our Lord appeared to her. She was not agitated, but earnest and resolute, like one in a struggle who is determined to win at any cost. She began by saying: 'As Thou hast come, Jesus, I renew my supplications for my sinner. He is Thy child and my brother; save him, Jesus'; and she named him. He was a stranger whom she had met in Lucca, and moved by spiritual impulse she had already warned him very often by word of mouth and by letter to listen to the dictates of his conscience and not be content with the mere public reputation of being a good Christian. Jesus seeming disposed to deal as a just Judge with this man, remained unmoved by the entreaties of His servant. But she nowise deterred rejoined: 'Why to-day, O Jesus, dost Thou not heed me? For one soul only hast Thou done so much! Why then wilt Thou not save this other one? Save him, Jesus, save him. . . . Be good, Jesus. Do not say that to me. In Thy mouth, Who art Mercy itself, that word "abandon" sounds badly; Thou must not say it. Thou hast not measured the Blood Thou hast shed for sinners, and now dost Thou wish to measure the enormity of our sins? . . . Dost Thou not heed me? And I, to whom must I turn? Thou hast shed Thy Blood for him as well as for me. Wilt Thou save me and not him? I will not rise from here; save him;

promise me that Thou wilt save him. I offer myself victim for all, but particularly for him. I promise not to refuse Thee anything. Dost Thou grant it me?—it is a soul. Remember, O Jesus, it is a soul that has cost Thee so much. He will become good, and not relapse.’

“In answer to all her entreaties Our Lord put forward the Divine Justice. But she growing still more fervent replied: ‘I am not seeking Thy Justice; I am imploring Thy Mercy. Then, Jesus, go in search of that poor sinner; press him to Thy Heart and Thou wilt see that he will be converted; at least try it. . . . Listen, Jesus, Thou sayest that Thou hast made many forcible attempts to convince him; but Thou hast not called him son; try that now, and tell him that Thou art his Father and that he is Thy child. Thou wilt find that on hearing this sweet name of Father, his hardened heart will soften.’ And here Our Lord, to prove to His servant what reason He had for remaining firm, began to show her one by one, with the most minute circumstances of time and place, the evil deeds of that sinner, adding that he had filled up their measure. The poor child showed her dismay; she let her hands fall, and heaved a deep sigh, as if she had lost the hope of succeeding. But quickly recovering from the shock she returned to the attack. “I know, Jesus,” she said, ‘I know it; that he has offended Thee thus grievously; but I have done worse and, for all that, Thou hast shown me mercy. I know, I know, O Jesus, that he has made Thee weep. But now, Jesus—Thou must not think of his sins; Thou must think of the Blood Thou hast shed, what immense Charity, O Jesus, hast Thou not lavished on me! Use with my sinner, I implore of Thee, all those delicacies of Infinite Love that Thou hast used towards me. Remember, Jesus, that I want his salvation. Triumph, triumph, I ask him of Thee in Charity.’

“In spite of all these efforts, Our Lord remained inflexible, and Gemma again relapsed into anguish and discouragement, remaining silent as if she had abandoned the strife. Then, of a sudden, another motive flashed to her mind that seemed invincible against all resistance. She became animated and spoke

thus: 'Well, I am a sinner; Thou Thyself hast told me so; that worse than me Thou couldst not find. Yes, I confess it, I am unworthy that Thou shouldst listen to me; but look, I present Thee another advocate for my sinner; it is Thine own Mother who asks Thee to forgive him. Oh! imagine saying no to Thy Mother! Surely Thou canst not say no to her. And now answer me, Jesus, say that Thou hast saved my sinner.' The victory was gained, the whole scene changed aspect, the tender-hearted Saviour had granted the grace, and Gemma, with a look of indescribable joy, exclaimed: 'He is saved, he is saved!' And then she came out of her ecstasy.

"This most affecting scene lasted quite half an hour. The words in which I have described it were in part taken down in writing, and in part preserved in my memory from which I have faithfully drawn them. When it was over, having withdrawn to my room, with my mind engrossed by a thousand thoughts, I suddenly heard a tap at my door—'A strange gentleman has called, Father, and wishes to see you.' I bade him come in. He threw himself at my feet sobbing and said, 'Father, hear my confession'—Good God! I thought my heart would burst. It was Gemma's sinner, converted that same hour. He accused himself of all that I had heard repeated by her in the ecstasy. He had forgotten one thing only, and I was able to remind him of it. I consoled him, told him just what had happened, got his leave to narrate these wonders of the Lord, and after a mutual embrace we parted."<sup>1</sup>

Father Germanus never again doubted that Gemma's intercourse with Our Lord was something very real indeed. But he did not therefore relax his critical vigilance. Not only was he often harsh and negligent towards her, snubbing her, leaving her letters unanswered, taking no steps about things she begged of him, like helping her to enter a convent of Passionists as she longed to do. These are ordinary precautions. But he also explained to Cecilia Giannini what sort of observations he wanted made, not only of her words but of her physical condition

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, pp. 115-17.

while in ecstasy. Thus they ascertained that she was insensitive at such times to pinpricks and to the flame of a taper—a fact which distinguishes her ecstasies from such things as hypnotic trance, for instance. They also found that her pulse and breathing were normal and that she was free from rigidity; her limbs remained ordinarily flexible. Careful notes were, of course, made of her stigmata and other lacerations, as of other curious phenomena—at one stage, for example, her heart became so hot that it left a large burnt patch on her skin, besides being hot to the touch even through her clothing. On various visits, Father Germanus was himself witness of these and other remarkable things, and thanks to his directions the records of the case were accurately kept.

Gemma wrote to him frequently—she expressed herself much more freely in writing than in speech. Except when in ecstasy she avoided talk and was all but impossible to “draw” about her experiences. These letters of hers, together with the notes kept of her conversations when in ecstasy, are the material for our study of her inner life.

Read in quantity they become monotonous because, though they show a steady growth, they turn on a comparatively small number of ideas. Not as few as “My Lord and my God,” which provided St. Francis of Assisi with a lifetime’s meditations, yet still few as compared with the ordinary dissipated attention of common life. Gemma’s thoughts turned on the sufferings of Christ, on the conversion of sinners, on the Attributes of God, the Blessed Trinity and the Eucharist. While there is not much variety in her treatment, each letter or discourse is an orderly whole, moving steadily from point to point, never running in circles or losing hold of proportion. This proportion and coherence are all the more remarkable as her letters were composed at top speed and never corrected. They flowed from her pen as easily as her discourses in ecstasy flowed from her lips, with the same capacity for holding their direction and observing the proportion of the subject.

Three main impressions are made by these letters and dis-

courses. The first is their piercing sincerity. The second is their amazing simplicity of expression. At times they seem no more than a loving babble shot through with nursery diminutives, the very baby talk of Heaven. Only at about the third reading does one wake up to their force. There is energy, of thought and expression, in every turn of phrase. "Oh, if all were to know how beautiful Jesus is, how amiable He is! They would all die of love. And yet how comes it that He is so little loved? Oh, it is time lost, to be with creatures! Our heart is made to love one thing only, our Great God."<sup>1</sup>

"Praise to the unbounded love of Jesus, Who moved to pity by my misery, offers me every means of coming to His Love! Thou Jesus art a treasure not known to me before; but now Jesus I have known Thee. Thou art all mine, especially Thy Heart. Yes, Thy Heart is mine, because Thou hast so often given It to me. But Thy Heart, Jesus, is full of light, and mine is full of darkness. When, oh when, shall I pass from this darkness to that clear light of my Jesus?"<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. *But This is the Twentieth Century!*

It is useless to tell the story of Gemma Galgani without first indicating that it is worth telling, indicating too the grounds on which certain obvious objections have been set aside. The reader has now before him a sufficiently representative collection of the facts of her life, set in a light which tries to make them intelligible without smoothing away the edges that offend our modern tastes. The result is a curious mixture of attraction and repulsion. To Gemma herself everyone feels drawn. By her experience we are all repelled. And, on the whole, repulsion has it. With every sentence we can feel our resistance stiffen. Let us then stop and take a look at that resistance.

And first, the deepest element in it—the difficulty which Gemma raises in our minds about God. Surely this God who asks for victims is simply a vindictive being who affronts both

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

our reason and our moral sense! The God to whom reason brings us is the Infinitely Perfect Self-subsistent Being, who is the Ground of all other existences and their Last End. This God of reason, incarnate in Jesus Christ, has unveiled Himself to us as a Father whose name is Love. At first sight it seems more reverent to the true God, the God of reason and of revelation alike, to recognize Gemma as simply deluded, the victim not of the Deity but of some obscure nervous complaint. The fact that all recognized principles of evidence would establish her health of mind is, surely, secondary in importance to the goodness of God.

We need to walk warily here. Falsehood cannot be reverent to God, because it is irreverent to reason. The True God is one who can stand the full blaze of evidence, no matter how inconvenient at first sight. It is a backhanded tribute, to reason, to conscience and to God, to dismiss the evidence of Gemma's sanity merely because it lands us in difficulties about God. We never help ourselves by tampering with truth in one direction in order to save its face in another; we merely show that we do not trust reason or, for that matter, God. It is not reverent, it is irreverent, to burk facts in order to spare His dignity. Genuine respect for reason, for conscience and for God requires us to accept the evidence about Gemma in full confidence that, if we take care of the truth, God can take care of Himself. After all, He is Truth, and we shall not find Him by any process of monkeying with evidence.

Mixed up with this difficulty about God is another less easy to put into words. It is that, whereas we take the Stigmata of St. Francis "in our stride," so to speak, we react quite differently to a contemporary. "I was afraid," said one of the *miraculéés* of Lourdes, cured instantaneously of spinal tuberculosis. "You see, God had come so close. He had touched me." If we are honest we have to confess that we prefer God to keep His distance. "Why shall we die therefore," exclaimed the Israelites of old, "and why shall this exceeding great fire consume us? For if we hear the voice of the Lord any more we shall die. What is all flesh, that it should hear the voice of the living God,

who speaketh out of the midst of the fire, as we have heard, and be able to live?"<sup>1</sup> It is far from reassuring to find Gemma saying almost exactly the same: "My beloved Jesus, but if Thou makest all others feel like this, on fire, and unable to live in Thy presence, people can no longer exist, and Thou wilt be left all, all alone."<sup>2</sup> We feel as the Israelites did but lack their command of language. Where they exclaimed, "Our God is a consuming fire," we are apt to twitter irritably: "But this is the twentieth century!"

Some things make it difficult to believe in progress; this is one of them. But silly and retrograde as the phrase is, it remains that "This is the twentieth century!" does in fact sum up most people's reactions to Gemma. A few years ago it would have been impossible to gain a hearing for her. And what now gives her a slight chance is simply that the twentieth century is letting us down. The thing we invoked to fend off the outrage of sanctity is itself becoming outrageous. This is not only a phoney war, it is a phoney world. Nor are air-raids the craziest things in it. An agriculture that is destroying the living soil of the earth; a credit policy that is making cash scarcer and scarcer for people in general; a production policy which is steadily lessening the number of consumers, besides ravaging the natural resources stored up through millions of years; an attempt to redress the balance by race-suicide (for that is what contraception comes to) —these combine to give the twentieth century its atmosphere of nightmare.

It is a matter of urgent necessity to find out just how and when we parted company with daylight sanity to plunge into this dopy dream. . . . And if we have any sense, we shall give our main attention to things chucked aside as outworn. The most likely place to find our mistake is on the dustheap. That is how the discovery of vitamins, for instance, was made. In Japan, a new disease, beri-beri, made its appearance, and a Japanese scientist tracked it down to the eating of modern polished rice. He thereby discovered that the rough husks of rice contain a

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy v. 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> Germanus, p. 249.

principle necessary to health, and so set the study of deficiency disease on a new course. It is among the rough husks of religion that we should be looking for the health-giving vitamin which old-fashioned people swallowed as a matter of course, but which our modern refinement has polished away.

Holiness is a vitamin without which societies die of spiritual rickets and scurvy. And it is the Saints whom we find most repellent who are likely to be our best friends. It is the twentieth century itself which challenges us to face the challenge of Gemma Galgani.

We shrink from Gemma because there was nothing escapist about her. If she was right, then penitence and expiation should have a much larger place in our lives than would be at all comfortable or convenient—or flattering. Our habit of treating religion as a pure convenience, a source of what we call comfort but which is more accurately flattery, this is the real root of our puzzle about God. We are upset by God's dealings with Gemma because our idea of God has become purely escapist. We like to kid ourselves by saying that our idea of God is too high to admit the notion of punishment; actually it is too low to admit the idea of holiness. A God who punishes sin is doubtless most distasteful—but the way we argue against Him shows only what a hold the habit of shirking has upon us. Likes and dislikes are no guide to truth, they are traps to catch the wishful thinker. That God requires expiation as the price of redemption; that He asks a small share, the merest token payment, from us all; that He chooses a few to co-operate in a special way with Christ's work of expiation—all this belongs to the husks we have long since milled out of our religion. No wonder our reason, will and conscience are showing signs of rickets!

Expiation is an idea so unfriendly to our escapist-ridden minds that we need all the help we can get if we are to bring ourselves to face it again. One of the best of helps is simply the character of the great expiatory Saints, who are among the sweetest, sunniest, most balanced souls that ever lived. Someone has said that what keeps him believing in immortality is the personal



character of the men who have believed in it; it is a belief, not of the cowardly and the base, but of the noblest spirits of our race. The personal quality of the great expiators offers a similar guarantee. They have a shining tenderness, an air of unquenchable youth—many were in fact very young—an ardour shot through with gaiety which brings them down to our homely levels again. However frightening their adventures, they themselves are the least frightening of mortals.

This is a most helpful guarantee and one we sorely need. Let us admit it frankly. But let us admit as frankly why we need a guarantee. What makes it difficult for us to see why a good God should punish sin is just our own sins. The only attitude which can seem wholly moral to a sinner is to say that sin does not matter; anything else must appear to him vindictive. It is this cataract film on his soul that blinds the sinner alike to the heinousness of sin and to the goodness of God. That is why, to make a start, we need to see through purer eyes than our own. We need a lead from those who are not only wiser and braver, but also more innocent than ourselves; for so only can they be near enough to God to see things a little from His point of view. As a class, the great expiatory Saints are the most innocent of mortals. The proportion among them of young girls is strangely high.

It is the clean in heart who see God. And what these clean in heart tell us, from out their deep intimacy with God, is that the initiative for their sufferings always lay with God. He called; they did but answer. It is the expiators who most urgently insist that "we love Him because He first loved us." To them, the whole operation goes forward in the realm of love, whose key and symbol is the Cross. It is God's love that raises up Saint after Saint to hold Calvary afresh before our sin-dulled hearts.

"Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those who have no imagination?" asks Cauchon in the Epilogue to Shaw's *Saint Joan*. The answer is, Yes, He must. For God, unlike Mr. Bernard Shaw, does not despise the unimaginative. "He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust."

As the centuries mount up the Gospel story recedes to a remote horizon where it tends to blur into myth and legend. To keep it in the sharp focus of actuality calls for a strength of imagination which few possess. Hence to each new generation God retranslates some part of the Gospel story in terms of its current life. Where the expiatory Saints are known and loved, the Cross of Christ retains an unfading modernity.

But God is in no man's debt. If He calls the expiators to an especially hard task He gives them both special helps and a special reward. The love which drives them to suffer is His very love loving in them. Thus for them suffering is a path to the very joy of God, since it springs from their union with His life of love. So they come to love suffering, not because it is good in itself—it is never that—but because it is the gateway of transcendent joy. And when they share in the mysterious withdrawal of the Divine presence, the dereliction of Calvary, though they feel it more keenly by contrast with what has gone before, they also have a keener appreciation of the reward awaiting their blinded faith. "For what have I in heaven? and beside Thee what do I desire upon the earth? For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away: Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever."<sup>1</sup>

### 5. *The Unpolished Gem*

Gemma Galgani was born on the 12th of March, 1878, in Camigliano, a village outside Lucca in Tuscany. She was the fourth child but the first girl, and her father was so delighted at the birth of a daughter that he insisted on calling her Gemma, a gem, though her mother protested that there was no Saint of that name in the calendar. As time passed, Enrico Galgani had cause to congratulate himself on his choice of a name. Gemma had looks, intelligence, character, and with it all that indefinable thing called charm. "Gemma stood alone," said their old manservant, "there was no one like her." Even the brothers and sisters—

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxiii. 25-6.

there were eight in the family ultimately—felt no resentment at their father's favouritism. The only person to object was Gemma herself. It hurt her sense of justice, but to everyone else it seemed too natural to call for remark.

When she was about a year old Enrico Galgani moved his family into Lucca, where he had a flourishing chemist's business, for the sake of educational facilities. Before she was three, Gemma was sent to a kind of nursery school, and at eight, after her mother's death, to the best girls' school in the town, conducted by the Sisters of St. Zita. Her brothers were in fear of her becoming too learned—"What need of so much study? You know so much already and yet it does not satisfy you." But her father offered to send her to the university, an offer which she refused.

All Gemma's teachers comment on her intelligence. She was both quick and hardworking, learning with rapidity partly because she gave her whole mind to her tasks. But they were even more struck by her character, which combined unusual self-control with unusual ardour and vivacity. That so vital a small person was never naughtily astonished them. They felt obliged to put it down to a definite personal choice, the curb imposed by a strong will on an impetuous nature.

There was another point about her perhaps more to our northern tastes than to those of her Italian preceptors: Gemma was candid to the point of bluntness. Not only was she perfectly truthful, she was unable to deal in the conventional compliments of polite intercourse. This is a type of character which we readily admire, at least in the immature, for we feel that it holds a higher promise for the future than too ready smoothness of speech. Italians regard it with more mixed approval, because of the high value they set on consideration for other people's feelings. They admire candour, but not at the expense of courtesy. They require success in the double event, and for a time at least Gemma did not come up to this very exacting standard.

She solved the problem, characteristically, by talking as little as possible. She had noticed that when people talk freely they

nearly always fall into sin, telling lies, or boasting, or talking unkindly of others. Her decision must have meant an extraordinary effort in a young creature, for when she did talk Gemma could hold her companions spellbound. She was a born leader, and moreover could have exercised the fascination of the school madcap. Instead, she closed her lips and retired into the background—to be sought out by anyone in trouble.

This school life was in fact something of a façade. Not that she failed to throw herself into it, but Gemma's real world lay elsewhere, in her home, and a home irradiated by the light of faith. Her father is described as "a good Catholic of the old-fashioned kind," an upright business man, generous almost to a fault, ready to hold out a helping hand without inquiring too deeply into the character and prospects of those who begged his help. Her mother, Aurelia Landi, was something more, a true saint, a woman driven to root deep in the Unseen because her roots in Time were threatened.

Aurelia had a delicacy of constitution which she bequeathed to several of her children and whose fatal termination she foresaw before the doctors had diagnosed consumption. When they did, she had been ill five years, so that their decision to separate her from her children came too late. Gemma made herself so miserable at this parting that her father gave in, and mother and child continued that intimate spiritual life together which they had long led.

As soon as Aurelia realized that she would soon have to leave her little children—and she realized it before the doctors did—her one idea was to prepare them for Heaven. Gemma was the most receptive, and on her the mother poured out the wealth of her own faith. She impressed on the tiny child "the preciousness of the soul, the deformity of sin, the happiness of belonging entirely to God, and the vanity of the world." Nor were these mere words. These truths, so fundamental that to many they seem to be not quite real, became the very texture of Gemma's mind and heart. This recognition of the fundamental as fully real, more real than the obvious appeal of the surface of life,

this lies at the root of all Gemma's character, and from the first it set her in a class apart.

In soil so ploughed her mother sowed another seed. Of the Mysteries of Faith she dwelt most on the Death of Christ. Lucca is the city of the Crucified. Its most precious treasure is a crucifix called the *Volto Santo*, which came into the town's possession in the eighth century, and was even then old. In the Middle Ages, when Lucca was a republic, its people chose the Crucified as their King. This devotion is in the very air of the place; Aurelia was giving voice and form to something all about the child when she pointed to a crucifix saying, "Look, Gemma, how this dear Jesus died on the Cross for us." And Gemma's coaxing, "Mamma, tell me more about Jesus," came to mean, "Tell me about Calvary."

As death drew near Aurelia increased her efforts to train her children for God, offering her sufferings to obtain a happy reunion of them all in Heaven. She taught them to go to Confession, herself preparing them to receive the Sacrament. But for Gemma her hope and her fear were alike greatest. She resolved therefore to commit her specially to the Holy Ghost, and for this purpose arranged for her to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation when she was, by the ideas of the times, still too young.

Gemma's Confirmation took place on the 27th of May, 1885, when she was a little over seven. It was one of the great days of her life. After the ceremony she remained in church to hear a Mass in thanksgiving and to pray for her mother. Suddenly she heard what she described as "a voice at my heart," in a distinct question: "Wilt thou give Me Mamma?" "Yes," she replied, "but provided Thou takest me also." "No," said the Voice, "give Me thy mother without reserve. Thou hast to wait for the present with thy father. I will take thee to heaven later."<sup>1</sup> . . . Gemma said "Yes," and ran home crying, expecting to find her mother at the point of death. She had to pass a stiffer test, for Aurelia lived over a year longer. Gemma's surrender of her

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 8.

mother to God was no flash-in-the-pan emotion; it was tested through sixteen months.

After her mother's death Gemma was sent to an aunt in the country, Elena Landi, who like everyone with whom she stayed wanted to keep her for good. But one of her brothers made himself so unhappy without her that her father decided at last to reassemble all his children at home. So just before Christmas, about three months after her mother's death, Gemma returned to Lucca, and after Christmas left the nursery school for the fine school of the Sisters of St. Zita.

She did well there, not only at her lessons but in the artistic training so highly esteemed in her native land. Yet her real life during these years lay in the line of her religious development. The shock of her mother's death deepened her mother's main lesson. More and more Gemma felt at her heart the unreality of all created things compared with their Creator.

Entirely through her own initiative, she made her First Communion when she was nine, instead of waiting till the then usual age of eleven. Neither her family nor her teachers encouraged such an innovation. But she begged hard for it: "Give me Jesus, and you will see how good I will be. I shall be quite changed. Give Him to me, I cannot live without Him." At last her confessor, Monsignor Volpi, yielded to her pleading. "If we do not want to see our Gemma die of longing," he said half-jestingly to her father, "we must allow her to go to Communion." Enrico Galgani gave in chiefly out of regard for her health.

He was a good deal staggered when Gemma begged to be allowed to make a ten days' retreat at the convent, in preparation for her First Communion, for he could hardly bear to let her out of his sight even for the needful school hours. But again she got her way, and found the quiet of the convent "a paradise." In the instructions, the point that came home to her was, "He who receives Jesus, lives by His life" (an echo of St. John vi, 34). "Then when Jesus shall be in me," she thought to herself, "I shall no longer live in myself, because Jesus will live in me." On

the great day, she "arose quickly and ran to Jesus. . . . I then understood the promise of Jesus: 'He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me. . . .' I felt seized with a desire to make that union with my God everlasting. I felt more detached from the world, and more than ever disposed to recollection."<sup>1</sup> All her life she observed the anniversary of her First Communion, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, as one of the great days of her year.

Before she left school Gemma had her first taste of a trial which was to grow to enormous dimensions later—desolation. She was about thirteen when all her fresh young delight in religion left her. For a year she lost not only her attraction to prayer but her sense of the nearness of God. This type of trial is absolutely necessary if our love of God is to be purged of selfishness. As long as we love God for the pleasure of His presence, we are really loving ourselves. It is only by taking that pleasure away that God can train us to love Him for His own sake. Gemma held on pluckily in this year of darkness, sticking to her now boring prayers, keeping a grip, in the face of blankness, of her old horror of sin and her sense of the need for detachment from the world.

This searching test was hardly over when new trouble met her; her favourite brother died, like their mother, of consumption. Gemma fell ill with grief and had to be taken from school for good. She settled down at home, in a rather difficult position, as there was no grown woman to give her the chaperonage which Italian ideas demand for girls in their teens. Help however came. Her grandfather and an uncle died about this time and two of her father's sisters joined the Lucca household. Gemma was fond of her aunts and they of her, and they sympathized enough with her devoutness to make it easy for her to go daily to Mass. Her father also insisted on her going for walks, and she often led the younger ones out into the country. But a young military officer took to following at a distance—Gemma had grown into a beautiful girl—and when she heard of this, for she never noticed him herself, she refused to leave the house except to go to church.

And then came her father's bankruptcy. In his easy-going

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 15.

generosity he had backed bills for the unlucky to an unwise degree, and the creditors came down on him. Gemma never forgot the scene—she recurred to it in the delirium of her last illness—for they not only stripped the house but emptied the children's pockets for pennies. Enrico Galgani then developed cancer in the throat. His death was heroic, but he left his family to absolute destitution.

Gemma was first sent to another aunt, a well-to-do woman who would gladly have kept her for the sake of her charming company. Nor were the old people alone in finding her charming. A young man of good family and income made an offer for her hand. Gemma was in desperation. She did not wish to marry; she did not wish to hurt anyone's feelings; she knew how selfish everyone would think her if she threw away such a chance of relieving her family of her support. In this quandary she fell ill and begged to return home. Reluctantly, her aunt and uncle let her go.

Back at home, this illness proved serious, no less than curvature of the spine, which turned to meningitis. She became completely deaf and developed great abscesses in her head and side. For a time she concealed these from her aunts, but when her state was discovered they called in a doctor. He, in turn, asked for a consultation. It was unproductive. After a careful examination the doctors gave up the case as hopeless.

For a year Gemma continued in a state of living death. She was so plucky and serene that people came to visit her simply for the encouragement of seeing her. This sweetness and constancy, however, covered a development of one of the stranger elements in her story, her open intercourse with the other world. This had begun a little before her illness, with a sight of her guardian angel; and she was already accustomed to hearing the "voice at my heart" which had first spoken at her Confirmation. Now, however, a great development took place.

First came a temptation of the devil, evidently something new in kind, for she felt it as a personal contact and was aware of the evil presence. "If thou wilt be guided by me," he said, "I will



take thee out of this suffering and cure thee perfectly, giving thee every health and pleasure thou desirest"—a version in terms of Gemma's circumstances of the old: "All this will I give thee, if thou wilt only fall down and adore me."

What made these suggestions insidious was Gemma's distress at the expense her illness meant for her family. It would have served but little to tempt her with longer life, so strong was her desire for heaven. The only possible bait was her affection, so right and natural in its own place, wrong only if it competed with an overriding claim. She had, in fact, reached a critical point in her inner life: Our Lord was asking from her detachment even from good and wholesome human attachments, since they interfered with what He intended to do with and through her. "If you were dead to yourself," He had said to her some time before, "you would not be troubled." Because this step was vital to her whole future growth, Satan intervened in a new way to try to frustrate it.

Her mind seized the heart of the issue—she was being asked to betray the very foundation of her life. "First the soul, then the body!" she exclaimed, resisting the tempter with all her might. Then as the temptation returned with new force she sought allies. She called on a young Passionist who had died in 1862, and has since been canonized as St. Gabriel of the Dolours, and the temptation passed.

She had heard of him from a visitor who insisted on lending her his life, but so far she had been too little interested to read the book. Now, however, she read it with avidity, finding herself gripped by the story of a kindred soul. Kindred in the inner life. For St. Gabriel is the opposite of St. Gemma in outward things; the course of his life could hardly have been less extraordinary. Yet inwardly they were brother and sister, and from this time they were knit together in what one can only call one of the great friendships of history. One night in 1898, Brother Gabriel of the Dolours appeared to her in a dream. "Be good," he said, "and I will come back to thee." He became one of her most frequent visitors.

As the doctors had given her up, Gemma's friends sought for supernatural help for her. She was inundated with suggestions: let her vow that, if cured, she would enter this or that religious order. And a fine choice was offered her, the Capuchin Sisters, the Teresians, the Servites, the Visitation, the Sisters of St. Camillus de Lellis (to which the nuns who nursed her belonged). Gemma had long wished to be a nun; the only difficulty in her mind was, which order? In her state of illness this could not be seriously discussed. She obtained leave, however, to make a vow of virginity to Our Lady. The night before the priest was to come to receive her vow Gemma fell peacefully asleep. In a dream St. Gabriel again appeared to her. "Gemma," he said, "make your vow to be a religious freely and with good heart, but add nothing to it." Begged to explain he merely smiled and said, "My sister." Then he disappeared.

All this time her condition was growing worse. Early in 1899, as her state seemed desperate, the doctors resolved on desperate measures. They cauterized her spine in nine places and opened the great abscess in her side. She refused an anæsthetic, and bore this terrible treatment with hardly a sound. It failed. A fresh abscess formed in her head, and on the 2nd of February she received Viaticum.

One of her old teachers, a Sister of St. Zita, now made a new suggestion: Let Gemma make a novena to St. Margaret Mary Alacocque, to obtain either her cure or the grace of going straight to heaven. Gemma began the novena simply because she had promised, forgot, started again, forgot again, and on the 23rd of February began anew for the third time. She was in a state of great exhaustion and could hardly recite the prayers. Towards midnight, she heard the rattling of a rosary, a hand was laid on her head, and a voice repeated nine times the *Pater*, *Ave* and *Gloria*. Then the same voice asked: "'Do you wish to recover? Pray with faith every evening to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. I will come to you until the novena is ended, and we will pray together to this Most Sacred Heart.' He (St. Gabriel) continued to come every evening;

he placed his hand on my forehead and we recited the *Paters* together."

On the ninth day of the novena Gemma made her confession and received Holy Communion. Jesus said to her, "Gemma, dost thou wish to recover?" She was immediately and completely cured. There was no period of convalescence. From that time until her last illness Gemma remained a thoroughly healthy girl.

Great was the joy around her. Her own happiness too was deep, but its special cause was the words of Jesus: He had taken her for His child. "I will be always with thee and act as thy Father, and she shall be thy Mother," He said, pointing to Our Lady of Dolours. "Paternal help shall never be wanting to those who place themselves in My hands; nothing therefore shalt thou lack, even though I Myself have deprived thee of every help and consolation in this world."<sup>1</sup>

After allowing a little time to make sure that her cure was stable Gemma began to think of entering a convent. Her family made no difficulties, and to Gemma the sole difficulty was choosing the convent. The only community of Passionist nuns at that time was at Corneto, and Italian girls do not usually go far from home to enter religion. Gemma desired complete enclosure, so her friends, the nursing Sisters of St. Camillus de Lellis, were ruled out. There remained the Convent of the Visitation in Lucca, approved by her confessor, Monsignor de Volpi, and indicated too by her cure at the intercession of St. Margaret Mary. She accordingly entered the Visitation as a postulant, made an excellent impression as to character, but after a few weeks was refused. Religious Orders are not keen on taking members from consumptive families, and other obstacles arose as well.

With intense regret Gemma returned home. "Lord, what do You want with me?" she asked forlornly. And a Voice replied: "Rise, take courage, abandon thyself without reserve to Jesus, love Him with all thy being, offer no obstacles to His designs,

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, pp. 45-6.

and thou shalt see the great strides He will cause thee to make in a little time without thy knowing how. Fear nothing; for the Heart of Jesus is the Throne of Mercy, where the miserable are the most readily received." She was heartened at once. "Oh, my Jesus," she cried, "how greatly I wish to love Thee, but I don't know how." And the Voice answered: "Dost thou wish to love Jesus always? Never cease even for a moment to suffer for Him. The Cross is the throne of true lovers; the Cross is the patrimony of the elect in this life."<sup>1</sup>

It was not her first inkling of this. During the Holy Week of 1899 she had had her first vision of the Crucified. While she still lay ill, one of her old mistresses of the Sisters of St. Zita had suggested to her that she make the Holy Hour regularly on Thursdays. Gemma adopted the practice, and it happened that her first Holy Hour out of bed, after her cure, fell on Holy Thursday. She was rapt out of herself, remaining prostrate on the ground for several hours. When she came to herself she retained an intense sense of her own sinfulness, which never left her and which she reckoned the greatest of the graces given her. (So differently do the minds of Saints work from our own!) As she said, "The Wounds of Jesus were so deeply impressed on my mind that they have never since left it."

This was before her unsuccessful postulanship. The next development was again on a Thursday, the vigil of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, which was the anniversary of her First Communion and one of her dearest days. She was making the Holy Hour when, "all of a sudden, more quickly than usual, I felt a piercing sorrow for my sins; but I felt it so intensely that I have never since experienced anything like it. That sorrow, I might say, almost brought me to death's door. Next I felt all the powers of my soul in recollection. My intellect knew nothing but my sins and my offences against God; my memory recalled them all, and set before me all the torments that Jesus had endured to save me; my will moved me to detest them all and willingly suffer everything to expiate them. A world of thoughts

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 58.

turned in my mind and they were thoughts of grief, love, fear, hope, encouragement.

"This recollection was quickly followed by a rapture out of my senses, and I found myself in the presence of my dear Heavenly Mother who had my Angel Guardian on her right. He spoke first, telling me to repeat the act of contrition, and when I had done so my Holy Mother said: 'My child, in the name of Jesus may all thy sins be forgiven thee.' Then she added: 'My Son Jesus loves thee beyond measure, and wishes to give thee a grace; wilt thou know how to render thyself worthy of it?' My misery did not know what to answer. Then she added, 'I will be a mother to thee; wilt thou be a true child?' She opened her mantle and covered me with it. At that moment Jesus appeared with all His Wounds open; but from those Wounds there no longer came forth blood, but flames of fire. In an instant those flames came to touch my hands, my feet and my heart. I felt as if I were dying, and should have fallen to the ground had not my Mother held me up, while all the time I remained beneath her mantle. I had to remain several hours in that position. Finally, she kissed my forehead, all vanished, and I found myself kneeling; but I still felt great pain in my hands, feet and heart. I rose to go to bed, and became aware that blood was flowing from these parts where I felt the pain. I covered them as well as I could, and then helped by my Angel I was able to get into bed. In the morning . . . I could not remain standing and felt every moment that I should die. These pains did not leave me until three o'clock on Friday—Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Miserable embarrassment was the keynote of Gemma's life for the next year and more. She had little privacy at home, yet shrank from notice. One of her aunts turned against her; her eldest brother made coarse fun of her with his associates. Sympathy distressed her even more. God, she felt sure, had never granted such an honour to anyone as wicked as herself—how then could she be sure that it was not all a delusion, or maybe

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 58–60.

even diabolic? To anyone as sensitively honest as Gemma, the fear of deceiving others was acute torture.

In this tangle of wretchedness she at first shrank from telling her confessor, Monsignor Volpi—how could she go with such a story to the priest who knew the secrets of her conscience from childhood and would therefore know her utter unworthiness, not only of signal honour but even of God's mercy? For a whole month she hung back, and was still hesitating when, with the rest of Lucca, she went to church to attend a mission preached at the Pope's behest throughout Italy.

And there in the pulpit was the habit she had seen in her dreams, the habit worn by St. Gabriel when he had appeared to her! In Lucca, the mission had been entrusted to the Passionists, but Gemma, too preoccupied with her own worries, had failed to put two and two together. She was completely taken by surprise. But she was also encouraged by the coincidence. Obedient to an inner prompting she made her story known to one of the missionaries, Father Gaetano. He, of course, told her that she must be open with her own confessor, but he also promised to get in touch with her again when he returned to Lucca.

The Gianninis had been benefactors of the Passionists, so that their house was the natural place for Father Gaetano to put up when he came back to Lucca some weeks later. Remembering his promise, he asked Signora Cecilia, sister of the Chevalier Matteo Giannini, to send for Gemma. Cecilia was very glad to do so, for though at this time she only knew Gemma by sight she had been impressed by the girl's quiet, recollected demeanour in church. At the meeting, Cecilia was so drawn to Gemma that she began, as was told before, to cultivate her acquaintance, and at last proposed her inclusion in the Giannini household.

The solution was satisfactory all round. The Galganis, sorry to lose Gemma for their own sakes, were yet glad for hers, as they were in no position to refuse an offer of support. The priests concerned had her where she could be kept under observation. Gemma herself secured protection from prying curiosity—

a desire so deeply respected by the Gianninis that she lived there for over three years with only the tiniest leakage of gossip about her. Here she was examined by the Superior of the Passionists, Father Peter Paul, at whose order Father Germanus came to Lucca to examine her in the light of his expert knowledge. Fully expecting to find her a fraud, either conscious or unconscious, he was entirely won by her humility. From that time Father Germanus became her guide in life and her champion after her death.

### 6. *Child of Dolours*

The story of Gemma Galgani so easily degenerates into a catalogue of marvels that steps have to be taken to secure room for other elements. Marvels do not make a Saint. They are a means sometimes used by God to call attention to a Saint, while also underlining the fact that God is not tied to the familiar ways that seem to us ordinary, but which are simply His choice for mankind. At the same time, God-chosen marvels are not so much stucco ornament plastered on to a life functionally complete without them. In the case of Gemma, the marvels are organic to the picture. Yet there remains a danger lest they obscure the less eye-taking parts of the design.

Gemma's life with the Gianninis has already been outlined. She finally came to stay in September 1900, bringing with her a small supply of underclothing, two black dresses, a cape and a hat, and nothing could ever persuade her to let them give her anything new. Her appearance, too dowdy to be quaint, attracted unfavourable notice from the little boys of Lucca, who waylaid her as she went and came from church. Casual observers sometimes thought her unruffled placidity must mean that she was too stupid to know she had been insulted; even spitting in the face awoke not the least flash of anger. Those who knew her better, knowing her natural impetuosity and quickness, were amazed at her imperturbable sweetness. And those who remembered how her father had liked to see her dressed, for in his eyes

nothing was too good for his lovely daughter, were equally astonished at her contentment with clothes which were something more than shabbily unfashionable.

This acceptance was part of a general attitude to all that is innocently delightful. For instance, Gemma never allowed herself to smell flowers. This was no condemnation of pleasure; she merely felt that all such things did not go with the life of absolute sacrifice to which she had been called. Artistry—and Gemma was artistically gifted—forbade such a mixing of styles. She was musical and had a good voice, yet was never heard to sing. She had painted well at school, but gave it up entirely. She was a skilled embroidress, yet chose for her share the coarsest mending in the house. She had a certain poetical gift, but was only once persuaded to use it for a friend. Her artist's sense of fitness rightly put these things aside as incongruous to the main theme of her life.

Where talents remain unmatured it is impossible to assess them. Gemma's talents may have been no more than a school-girl knack with pretty things, though the severe sense of form shown in her elimination of prettiness points to gifts of a higher order. Whatever the degree of her talents, however, it remains that Gemma's attitude towards them contrasts with that of many other Saints. St. Rose of Lima, we have seen, made full use of her skill in embroidering and gardening. And Gemma's contemporary, St. Therese of Lisieux, who came from the same sort of home and had in many ways the same sort of equipment, also cultivated her talents as occasion offered. Gemma's rejection is individual to herself, functional to her strange vocation and her own sense of fitness. This points to unusual poise; the unbalanced have a marked propensity for erecting personal impulses into universal laws. But if Gemma judged only for herself, she judged inflexibly. All innocent pleasure in innocent prettiness she put out of her life.

This inflexibility of purpose could be guessed from her portraits. Photographs taken while she was in ecstasy show a face whose fundamental structure is of the firmest. The chin is



that of a fighter, the straight nose and broad brow speak of thought and decision. Selfwill could easily have made her hard; even the soft contours of youth cannot disguise the purposefulness of her character. The hardness has, however, all been turned against herself, and the result is a mouth exquisite in its lines of tenderness and rich with the power of love. But the life of the face is in the eyes, widely spaced under delicate black brows. Dark hair parted in the middle and smoothed on each side enhances the marble quality in a face where resolution has been hardly tamed by love. If there is sadness in the expression, it could not be otherwise where ardour has been so painfully disciplined into serenity. A face of contradictions, whose promise of fire goes strangely with its look of peace, it underlines the aptness of her own name for herself, "Child of Dolours."

Gemma's history as a mystic was, as has been already said, almost abnormally normal. There is just one individual touch—she shrank from describing herself as the Spouse of Christ. After she had attained the Mystical Marriage, when the Child Jesus leaned from His Mother's arms and wedded her to Himself with a ring, she brought herself for a time to use the traditional phrase. But soon she slipped back into her earlier language; Jesus was her Father and she His child. That was the note of her intimacy with Him.

Mixed up with this—mixed up indeed with her attitude to everything—was her overwhelming sense of her own sinfulness. The self-condemnation of the Saints always sounds exaggerated in ordinary ears, but even among Saints Gemma goes to unusual lengths. As with St. Aloysius Gonzaga, we can concede her a temperament whose fires might easily have turned to evil. But that does not seem to go the whole way. We come nearer with the common fact that to have God draw near is an eye-opening experience for anybody. Even in the Old Testament we find Job crying out, "With the hearing of the ear have I heard Thee, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes."<sup>1</sup> This plays its part in the

<sup>1</sup> Job xlii. 5-6.

story of Gemma, as of all whom God has specially drawn to Himself. No one has ever felt worthy of that intimacy; its effect is to awaken a clear recognition of unworthiness. Yet it is remarkable that while St. Thérèse of Lisieux speaks constantly of her "nothingness," St. Gemma speaks of her sinfulness. There is nothing to choose between them in innocence or, for that matter, in force of character. Yet they reacted with marked difference to the Divine.

One can only suggest that Gemma's sense of sinfulness was a special grace from God to protect her from the danger of pride, to which unusual experiences are always a temptation. St. Thérèse's life was singularly free of marvels; for her this problem did not arise. But it arises at every turn in the story of Gemma, so thickly studded with the marvellous. Her head could easily have been turned, if her consciousness had not been kept filled with this devastating recognition of her status as a sinner.

When people showed her their distrust Gemma suffered acutely, because her own good sense recognized how much there was to be said for such mistrust. The danger of delusion was a most present reality to her mind, gaining a fresh edge from her horror of the least untruth; bad as it was to be deceived oneself, it was even more horrible to deceive others. Hence, in a way, it was almost a relief to be doubted, though in another it awakened all her anguish. The sting of these fears was her sense of sinfulness. God had never shown such favours to anyone as wicked as she—this is a recurring theme in her letters—therefore it might all be a trick of the devil.

Her remedy, spontaneously chosen, was scrupulous obedience to her director. This is a most searching test of humility, for it probes into the secret recesses of pride as nothing else can do. It is pride which gives the devil his chance, and Gemma realized that she could not go wrong so long as she obeyed the open, public authority of the Church, exercised at times through unsympathetic characters or through men of lower spiritual discernment than herself. Their deficiencies offered the very safeguard she needed; their humdrumness defended her, as

nothing else could do, against the dangers of her exceptional adventures. This clear-sightedness in her did more than anything to keep the suspicious still willing to bother about her; little as some of them knew of ecstasy, obedience is a proof of wholesomeness which they could and did understand. This obedience Gemma carried to such lengths that she obeyed her directors in preference to Our Lord's commands received in ecstasy. She never executed those commands without getting leave first from either Monsignor Volpi or Father Germanus. This meant putting a most painful brake on herself; not only did love make her long to obey Our Lord's least desire, but sometimes He rebuked her sternly for not doing what He had commanded. It cost her immense anguish to keep within what her directors allowed. Yet such heroic obedience is the best evidence, the only satisfactory evidence, of her freedom from self-display and self-love. In the end, it was a tension of this kind which brought about her death.

Even in the small circle admitted to know of her ecstasies and sufferings, she met with a good deal of chilling distrust. The Passionist to whom she had first opened her heart, Father Gaetano, turned against her. The Superior of the Passionist nuns at Corneto also turned against her, refusing to allow her even to make a retreat within their walls. Father Germanus, though convinced of the reality of her experiences, made it a principle to treat her coldly—this, in fact, was the basis of Gemma's perfect trust in him; she knew he would not carelessly let her be self-deceived; intuitively she recognized the value of the safeguard he was offering her. But genuinely painful was the attitude of Monsignor Volpi, her confessor from childhood, who blew hot and cold, though mostly cold. To him Father Germanus unhesitatingly declared his conviction of Gemma's genuineness, but without producing any permanent impression. Monsignor Volpi, though unwilling to think evil of a girl whose integrity was well known to him, remained troubled and sceptical, and nothing that Father Germanus urged was able to settle his mind.

Conscientiously determined to do his duty, Monsignor Volpi resolved to have Gemma examined by a doctor. He told no one of his plan, but she learned of it in ecstasy and wrote to tell him that Our Lord absolutely forbade it—if the doctor came he would find nothing. Possibly this made the confessor even more suspicious, for he arrived with the doctor during one of the Thursday–Friday ecstasies after the Stigmata had appeared, and of course was admitted. The doctor took up a wet cloth and wiped away the blood, which at once ceased to flow. Scornfully he declared his conviction that Gemma had made the wounds herself, was in fact simply a sensation-monger. He went off, and when Gemma came out of her ecstasy she found a marked coolness towards her on the part of the Gianninis. But in church, where she had begged to be taken—"Take me to Jesus, I have need of Jesus"—the bleeding recommenced, as was verified by Monsignor Volpi, to whom she showed her hands. After that she went home with Signora Cecilia, perplexed herself and a cause of perplexity to her friends.

Gemma made no attempt to defend herself by argument. The whole thing was beyond her and she wisely left it to Our Lord who had laid this trial upon her. It was the common sense of Signora Cecilia which found the flaw in the doctor's theory. Taking a cue from him, she made a practice of wiping away the flow of blood; but under her hands it at once flowed again. Plying the cloth, Cecilia remarked: "Even if she opens the wounds, how could she close them again?" This simple consideration, combined with Gemma's demeanour, restored the shaken confidence of the Gianninis. Once more, it was Gemma's character which made those around her stop and think instead of condemning her out of hand.

The episode, however, remains curious, if only by contrast with other modern stigmatists. Not long before Gemma another case had been very thoroughly investigated. And in our own times the Austrian stigmatist, Theresa Neumann of Konnersreuth, believed to be still alive (1942), has been subjected to every test which the ingenuity of scientists can suggest. Gemma's

refusal of scientific investigations is, like much else, personal to herself, not a general rule among saints, even saints of her own type. And undoubtedly her attitude creates a prejudice against her.

Thinking a little further, however, we notice something equally curious: the effect of this refusal is to throw us back on the kind of evidence accepted in a court of law. While expert evidence has its place in judicial procedure, the eyesight of ordinary people is also accepted as a sufficient basis for the class of facts that can be attested by eyesight. Moreover, in countries that make use of trial by jury, even the evidence of experts is passed upon by the common sense of ordinary people, the jury. A good trial is a very interesting combination of expert skill and ordinary common-sense wisdom.

The effect of Gemma's refusal was in fact to secure her a public trial by jury, instead of an inquiry by experts behind closed doors. The expert was not excluded; Father Germanus was there, to deal with the psychological side of the case which calls for the specialist. But the physical facts, on which even the specialist based his conclusions, did not call for the expert; they lay open to anyone blessed with good sight and a quite ordinary degree of truthfulness and accuracy. Moreover, these phenomena were presented to their gaze again and again, so that there could be no question of sudden hallucination. And in so far as emotion operated, it operated to produce a hypercritical temper, for the most likely emotion is sheer boredom. Does anyone envy the Giannini household, whose older members gave up their free time, week after week, to the dull routine job of making observations of Gemma? However exciting the first sight, repetition quickly made it monotonous. The mere waiting and watching tended to produce that irritable fatigue so favourable to hole-picking. Yet they never found a hole.

The facts which they attested call for no expertise whatsoever. They call for just what the Gianninis gave, methodical attention. Their testimony is amply sufficient for a court of law. A flow of blood is obvious to anybody. That it starts at a certain time and

stops at another needs little more than a reliable clock and eyes to read it. That weals are deep cuts right to the bone can be verified by anyone with average eyesight. That a wound is a perforation, a hole right through a limb, can be settled by an exploring finger. On the physical side the facts led in evidence are precisely of this order.

Medical evidence would add nothing to the force of facts like these; all it would do would be to pander to superstition. The prestige of science has led to an unnecessary distrust of ordinary powers of observation, and so to a tendency to call in the expert where eyesight would suffice. This displacement of the eyewitness opens the door to tyranny. Gemma's attitude was instinctive. But though unreasoned, it was a highly reasonable protest against a very dangerous encroachment on human liberties. The subordination of ordinary human faculties to the expert deprives the ordinary man of one of his most valuable defences, the right to be heard. Gemma's story is in fact a Divine protest against this invasion of basic human rights.

Some time in 1901 Father Germanus suggested to Gemma that she ask Our Lord to take away the outward appearance of the Stigmata. Our Lord warned her that it would mean an increase of pain, and so it fell out. Her sufferings became more severe when there was no longer visible sign of what caused them. The flow of blood, Gemma admitted, would have been a relief.

During these last two years, after the outward appearances had ceased, Gemma increased her austerities in other directions. She ate next to nothing. She was also more and more involved in mysterious combats with the devil, who appeared to her in various shapes, dragged her round the room by the hair, and even tore her hair out by the roots. When these phenomena first began, Our Lord assured her that all would be well, she must never yield to fear whatever happened. And following this rule Gemma quietly let herself be knocked about without losing her serenity or in any way weakening her perfect union with God.

One reason for these attacks was her work for sinners. Again and again Our Lord made known to her the needs of some

specially sinful soul, and again and again Gemma won a conversion by her prayers. This was the side of her life most widely known in Lucca, and people with troublesome relations began to come to beg her to pray for them. Gemma always denied that her prayers were more efficacious than those of the sinner's own friends; yet as a matter of fact they won a complete change of heart in cases that had proved obdurate to every appeal of family affection and the persistent prayers of near relations.

The heaviest shadow of this last phase of her life was her increasing dereliction. As the outward crucifixion ceased, she became more and more crucified in heart, sharing the spiritual desolation of Calvary when she no longer visibly shared the Cross. Her union with God lay more and more wholly in the will. Sense, emotion and imagination had early ceased to have much part in her inner life; now understanding too was darkened and her love apparently denied. She existed in a crushing darkness, suffering in body, mind and soul, living by pure faith when every aid to faith was paralysed and numb.

Gemma had never ceased to want to be a nun, and a Passionist nun at that. She also desired to see a community of Passionist nuns in Lucca, and much of the energy of her life, both in her ecstasies and at other times, went into plans for a convent in Lucca. At first she believed that it was Our Lord's will that she should be a member of such a community. He promised it to her provided that those in authority did their part. As, however, they still delayed, Our Lord issued an ultimatum: If the convent were not founded, He would take Gemma away in six months.

On hearing this, the unfortunate Father Germanus "writhed as it were in thorns, and besought His Divine Majesty to open me some way of acting." Others, however, continued to make difficulties. And then Gemma fell ill. Father Germanus ordered her to ask God for her cure. She did so, and Our Lord consented to cure her, but said that it would be temporary unless the convent was immediately taken in hand. Gemma accordingly recovered. She had been reduced to skin and bone by sixty days of illness, in which she had been unable to take anything to eat.

In a week she was perfectly well again. But as the business about the convent hung fire, three weeks later her illness returned, and this time there was no recovery.

At about this time Our Lord renewed to her His earlier call for victims and expiation. The whole purpose of the Lucca convent was to provide for this need. On one occasion Jesus appeared to her, "repeating that the Justice of His Heavenly Father had need of victims," and added, "How often have I not withheld it, presenting to Him a group of loved souls and generous victims! Their penances, their hardships, their heroic acts have restrained it. Now again I have presented Him with victims, but they are few." She asked Him who they were, and He said: "They are the daughters of My Passion [i.e. the Passionist nuns at Corneto]. If thou only knewest how often I have seen My Father relent as I offered them to Him." And He ended with these words: Write at once to thy father [Germanus], tell him to go to Rome and speak to the Pope of this desirable work; let him say that a great chastisement is threatened and victims are needed."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, as there were still delays, Our Lord put it all to Gemma herself. "I have need," He said to her, "of a great expiation specially for the sins and sacrileges by which ministers of the sanctuary are offending Me." . . . When, then, Our Saviour came to ask her if she would accept the expiation of those sins, with an impulse of her whole being, she exclaimed: "Dost Thou not know, O Jesus, that I accept it? Yes, at once, O Jesus; exhaust Thy vengeance on me and be glorified in this Thy miserable creature."<sup>2</sup>

At Gemma's urgent desire, Father Germanus came to see her at the beginning of this final illness. Sitting by the bed, he said, "Well, Gemma, what are we to do?" "Go to Jesus, Father," she answered in tones of inexpressible joy. "But, really?" I added. "Yes, Father, this time Jesus has told me clearly, so clearly. To heaven, my Father, to Jesus, with Jesus in heaven!" "But," I rejoined, "our sins, how are we to atone for them?"

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 325-6.



You would make it an easy matter!" "Jesus," she answered, "has thought of that. He will let me suffer so much in the short time I have to live, that, sanctifying my poor pains by the merits of His Passion, He will be satisfied and will take me with Him to Paradise." "But," said I, "I do not wish you to die yet." And she with characteristic vivacity replied: "And should Jesus wish it, what then?"<sup>1</sup>

Her illness as it developed began to include blood-spitting. In view of her family history—several brothers and sisters had died since their last mention—the doctors were bound to suspect consumption. The tubercle bacillus was never found, and in other regards the illness was not typical of tuberculosis. Still, it was felt only right to separate her from a family of young children, and the Gianninis were advised to send her away. This they were most unwilling to do, and in the end hired a little room for her just across the road. The little ones were kept away from her, but Signora Cecilia visited her constantly, as did Signora Giustina, the mother, and the older girls, especially Euphemia, who was about Gemma's age and her closest friend. She was nursed once more by her old friends, the Sisters of St. Camillus de Lellis, who were astonished not only by her patience and serenity, but also by her wisdom. In the years since they had known her Gemma had matured in mind and heart; she had that insight into the things of God which we sometimes find in the untaught. This spiritual wisdom was known to her intimates. But now it seems to have soared to new heights; "her words were so lucid, so exact and impressive that one could not expect better from a Doctor of the Church."<sup>2</sup> So said her nurses.

This last illness was a time of fierce trials. Not only was she the whole time in deepest spiritual darkness, but she was assaulted more savagely than ever by the Prince of Darkness himself. Her longing for Paradise increased, and at the same time her glad readiness to suffer as much and as long as God desired of her; "Better to suffer than to go to heaven when the pain is for Jesus and to give Him glory," she said.

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, pp. 327-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

In all this suffering Gemma made just one request for herself. "I have asked Jesus to let me die on a great solemnity: what a delightful thing to die on a great Feast!"<sup>1</sup> And so it was. She died on Holy Saturday, the 11th of April, 1903, an hour after the end of the Lenten fast, just as the faithful were shedding the mood of Good Friday to feel the Easter joy astir in their hearts.

It was a strangely forsaken death. The clergy were at the busiest moment of their whole year, too busy to come when sent for. The faithful Gianninis alone did not abandon her. As she was evidently very weak, the mother, Signora Giustina, seated herself on the bed and drew the weary head to her shoulder. Euphemia and Cecilia were kneeling by the bed, other members of the family a little further off, with the Sisters of St. Camillus de Lellis looking on. She had murmured softly, "Now it is indeed true that nothing more remains to me, Jesus, I recommend my poor soul to Thee . . . Jesus!" Then after half an hour's silence her head suddenly drooped, and without any agony, without even a sigh or a spasm, she was gone, so swiftly and gently that they could hardly believe her dead. Lucca quickly knew that it had been harbouring a great Saint, and on Easter Day gave her a funeral which was an earthly reflection of her welcome in Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Germanus, p. 348.

## A GOSPEL FOR SQUARE PEGS

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, 1873-97

"IT is impossible," I said, "for me to become great, so I must bear with myself and my many imperfections, but I will seek out a means of reaching Heaven by a *little way*—very short, very straight, and entirely new. We live in an age of inventions: there are now lifts which save us the trouble of climbing stairs. I will try to find a lift by which I may be raised unto God, for I am too small to climb the steep stairway of perfection."<sup>1</sup>

These words are the answer to a question that has been forming in our minds: What on earth have Saints like these to do with us? Granted that God does call souls along these exceptional ways, granted too that such calls are significant for the whole solidary life of the Body of Christ, what sort of practical bearing can they have for ordinary people like us?

The Saint at whom we are about to glance is the living answer to this question, for it arose in her own life in sharply personal form. From early girlhood, Thérèse Martin knew that God meant her to be a Saint. Naturally, her child's imagination jumped to the idea of sanctity on the grand scale. When in obedience to God's leading she entered a Carmelite convent at the age of fifteen, she found herself shut up to very little things, a routine of sweeping, washing, clearing the table, mending ancient blankets, weeding and window-cleaning. Nor were her companions much more exciting than her tasks. Except for three of her own sisters (there was a bigness about all those Martin girls) they were well-meaning but commonplace women, faithful enough to their vocation, but following it ploddingly without much inspiration. True, she had the Divine Office and the Carmelite Rule, things not commonplace at all, since they are distillations of genius from a rich tradition. In the main, though,

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, ed. T. N. Taylor, pp. 151-2.

the material from which to weave her life was dispiritingly humdrum. The vast energies of Thérèse were thus concentrated upon the narrowest, most boring commonplaces of labour and intercourse. Yet out of this material she shaped her Little Way, humanly speaking a similar distillation of genius.

No attempt can be made here to tell the story of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, to give her her official title, though the world at large has preferred a torrent of affectionate diminutives—Santina, Theresinha, Petite Reine, the Little Flower, to name but a few. For one thing, the story is too well known, or at least too easy to know, being more accessible than the life of any other Saint. For another, she herself has told it too well. Anyone who wants the full tale must seek it in her *Spiritual Autobiography*.<sup>1</sup> We must limit ourselves here to certain aspects of her significance.

In the first place, when Thérèse called herself "born for great things," she spoke nothing but the truth. Her whole nature was on a big scale—understanding, imagination, sensitiveness, force of will and power of love, all existed in her in exceptional vigour. Her keen mind pierced to the bottom of all the small experiences of her life, extracting from each a fullness of meaning which flabbier minds fail to find in a varied experience of great events. "The eagle's spirit is mine," she truly says in the amazing "Canticle of Love" which closes the *Autobiography*. Again and again we find her startled at the sweep and urgency of her desires.

For Thérèse humility came from no minimizing of the truth

<sup>1</sup> St. Thérèse's little book, *Le Récit d'une Ame*, is more generally known in English as *The Spiritual Autobiography* than as *The Story of a Soul*. A translation based on the definitive Carmelite edition is published in English with the title *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, with much valuable explanatory matter, edited by T. N. Taylor. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne.) A cheap edition, with a selection from the same editorial material, is also to be had, entitled *A Little White Flower*. The quotations in this chapter are from the larger volume, which gives a section of the Saint's sayings not included in the *Autobiography*, since they were compiled after her death, mainly by her novices.

about her greatness, but from a clear recognition of its origin. All she had was from God. She did not make herself; she had no business to take credit to herself either for her natural talents or her supernatural graces. This question had obviously been in her mind from early childhood, for at the beginning of the *Autobiography* she explains her considered opinion: "If a little flower could speak, it seems to me that it would tell quite simply what God had done for it, without hiding any of its gifts. It would not say, under the pretext of humility, that it was not pretty and had not a sweet scent, that the sun had withered its petals or the storm bruised its stem—if it knew such were not the case."<sup>1</sup> This thought ripened with her growth. During her last illness (she died of consumption at the age of twenty-five) a sheaf of corn was one day brought to her. Taking a heavily laden ear, she gazed on it and said, "That ear of corn, dear Mother, is the image of my soul, which God has laden with graces for me *and for many others*, and it is my earnest desire to bend always beneath the weight of His gifts, acknowledging that all comes from Him."<sup>2</sup> When she lay dying, her Prioress encouraged her, saying, "My child, you are quite ready to appear before God, because you have always understood the virtue of humility." And Thérèse replied, "Yes, I feel that my soul has never sought anything but the truth. . . . I have understood humility of heart."<sup>3</sup>

This, then, is Thérèse's teaching on humility—that it grows out of truth. "To me it seems that humility is truth. I do not know whether I am humble, but I do know that I see the truth in all things."<sup>4</sup> She wastes no time on self-depreciation, but goes straight to the truth about herself—her utter nothingness. Yet it was from the heart of this nothingness that she threw out her amazing claim: "God will do all I wish in Heaven, because I have never done my own will on earth."<sup>5</sup>

Such was the consummation of her little-girl day-dreaming over the life of Joan of Arc. When she was about eleven her

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 329.

head was full of tales of heroism, for her natural affinity was for everything on a big scale. And then one day "Our Lord made me understand that the only true glory is the glory which lasts for ever; and that to attain it there is no necessity to do brilliant deeds. . . . Then, as I reflected that I was born for great things, and sought the means to attain them, it was made known to me interiorly that my personal glory would never reveal itself before the eyes of men, but would consist in becoming a Saint."<sup>1</sup>

Equally straight was her growth in another line. Thérèse was naturally predatory, but she wasted no time on small raids. When she was tiny, an older sister once offered the two little ones a basket of discarded toys. The other little sister chose a ball. Thérèse, the baby, put out her hand saying, "I choose all!" and secured the whole loot. There was in her a streak of Rob Roy, an instinct for

The simple plan  
That they should take who have the power,  
And they should keep who can.

"My special favourites in Heaven," she confessed in after years, "are those who, so to speak, stole it, such as the Holy Innocents and the Good Thief. There are great Saints who won it by their works. I want to be like the thieves and win it by stratagem—a stratagem of love which will open its gates to me and to poor sinners."<sup>2</sup>

For Thérèse's raiding proclivities had early turned to this work of saving sinners. Characteristically, small projects held no interest for her. When as a little girl she first grasped the idea of saving souls by her prayers, she promptly looked round for the wickedest person she could hear of, a murderer whose crimes were filling all France with agreeable horror, and won his repentance at the guillotine itself. "My first child," this low ruffian became to her (they say he had not one redeeming trait), and the first of a great harvest. More and more she saw herself as the mother of starving souls, gaining their livelihood by her

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

sufferings. "Is that the way people hurry when they have children, and are obliged to work to procure them food?" was her rebuke to a novice dawdling on the way to the laundry.<sup>1</sup> Thérèse, mother of souls, like other mothers, never went off duty.

Her first triumph, in the matter of the murderer, holds the seeds of a lifelong attitude. If she, Thérèse Martin, with her hair in pigtails, wanted his conversion so badly, how badly God must want it too! "God would not inspire a wish which could not be realized,"<sup>2</sup> was the conclusion of her mature thinking, the answer to the way she was sometimes appalled by the vastness and urgency of her desires. But she had already anticipated the conclusion before she had fully thought it out. On her profession day, when she was only seventeen, she asked confidently for the conversion of all sinners and the release of all souls from purgatory. Nor was this childish lack of realization; it was the scale on which her mind habitually worked.

The sweep of her mind never comes out more staggeringly than in the great affirmation of her last illness. "Mother," she said one day, "I feel that my mission is soon to begin—to make others love God as I love Him . . . to teach souls my *little way*. . . ."

"I WILL SPEND MY HEAVEN  
IN DOING GOOD UPON EARTH.

. . . No, there cannot be any rest for me until the end of the world—till the Angel shall have said: '*Time is no more.*' Then I shall take my rest, then I shall be able to rejoice, because the number of the elect will be complete."

"And what is the '*little way*,'" they asked her, "that you would teach?"

"IT IS THE WAY OF SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD,  
THE WAY OF TRUST AND ABSOLUTE SELF-SURRENDER.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

"I want to point out to souls the means that I have always found so completely successful, to tell them that there is only one thing to do here below—to offer to Our Lord the flowers of *little sacrifices* and win Him by our caresses. That is how I won Him, and that is why I shall be made so welcome."<sup>1</sup>

Then, recurring to her old amazement at the boldness of her desires, she added: "Would God give me this ever-increasing desire to do good on earth after my death unless He wished to fulfil it? No, He would rather give me the longing to take my repose in Himself."<sup>2</sup>

Thérèse herself sets this Little Way in contrast with the Great Way of those Saints whose lives are full of exceptional austerities and illuminated by striking marvels. Her own story is as strikingly free from anything out of the common. She contented herself with the austerities prescribed by the Carmelite Rule—no light programme, by the way, though the thing Thérèse felt most was not laid down in the Rule, for it was the cold. She not only never asked for more blankets at night, she made a practice of never rubbing her hands together, or pinning up her wide sleeves, or shivering, or doubling up, or doing anything that could call attention to the fact that she was nearly numb. She took full advantage of any chance to suffer which the day sent her. The Little Way is not a way of having a comfy time, but a way of extracting the full spiritual leverage out of everyday rubs and inconveniences.

At the same time, it is a Way within anyone's reach. And once Thérèse had grasped just what it was God wanted her to do—work out a spiritual technique that *anybody* could handle—she set great store by being always imitable. When it was suggested to her that she might die on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, one of the great days of the Carmelite year, she answered quickly: "Die after Holy Communion! Upon a great feast! No, such will never be my lot. Little souls could never

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, pp. 231-2.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231, footnote.



imitate me in that. In my 'little way' all is most ordinary, for all I do must likewise be within their reach."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most remarkable things about St. Thérèse is what I can only call her futurism. In one sense her Little Way is as old as the Gospel itself. In another, it anticipates a situation which in her day had hardly arisen, though it has since all but engulfed the whole of human life. That situation is the enormous increase in the number of square pegs. Holes are being standardized to a new mechanical perfection of roundness, so that they fit fewer and fewer people. Most human beings are a little angular, and not one is mass-produced. Yet people are more and more being forced to accommodate themselves to things, and mass-produced things at that. This does more than hurt, it harms. It depersonalizes. It accustoms people to living at a subhuman level, acquiescing in inertia and helplessness as part of their inescapable fate. Mass amusements and standardized pleasures are all that await a folk already wearied by mass-producing and standardized work. As a result, boredom has become a constant. All the change they can get is from one way of being bored to another way of being bored. And they are forgetting that things were ever different.

This inhibits a very necessary and healthy activity: revolt. Those who have surrendered to boredom can never revolt wisely, for all they can ask of revolution is some fresh way of being bored. And that plays straight into the hands of tyranny. That is one reason for the unfruitfulness of modern revolutions; they all rivet the chains of boredom closer than before, and so make things easier for tyrants. No significant revolution can take place among a people who accept boredom as inevitable. But once people have tasted the sweets of an unbored existence, their revolts will become really dangerous again.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 232. Observe the contrast with St. Gemma, who prayed that she might die on a great feast. Details like this are a warning against imposing our narrow monotony of idea upon the wide and varied ways of God. An important item in the Little Way is the insistence upon the difference in souls.

That is why all the ingenuity of tyranny to-day is directed to securing acquiescence in boredom. It is also why the Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux is the most potent threat which tyranny has to face.

Thérèse's Little Way is the clue to really significant revolution, because it teaches people how to put significance into their boredom itself. This is simply an extension of Christ's work on Calvary; as He seized the most meaningless thing in our experience, innocent suffering, and wrested from it a new secret of meaning, so we are to seize our dehumanizing boredom and wrest from it a new secret of vital personality. People who can derive fuller personality from depersonalizing conditions will have outflanked tyranny in its most essential strategy. . . . Not that Thérèse had such grandiose results in view, but surely we may say that God had. God, in fact, set her in the circumstances best fitted to force her to discover this very secret. He set her down, a woman of genius whose heart and mind soared over all barriers of time and space, in the middle of about twenty well-meaning mediocrities whom she found thoroughly uncongenial. And Thérèse made her discovery because, instead of running away, she turned and faced the issue of uncongeniality.

One of the critical moments of her career came when she realized that her whole opportunity of loving on the grand scale was to be the rather limited members of her community. She told herself no lies about the difficulty. "I understood," she tells us, "how imperfect was the love I bore my Sisters in religion, and that I did not love them as Our Lord does." As soon as this struck her, "I set myself to find out how He had loved His Apostles, and I saw that it was not for their natural qualities, seeing they were but ignorant men, whose minds dwelt chiefly on earthly things. Yet He calls them His friends, His brethren." It was a dismaying discovery. Thérèse was far too intelligent to underestimate the difficulty, and far too honest to disguise or shirk it in any way. In any case, she could hardly have stifled her power of seeing through people with frightening clarity. Jane Austen had no clearer eye for character, or greater power

of probing to the roots of motive. Thérèse could certainly have been a great satirist. She had none of the blindness so helpful to love. If she loved instead of satirizing, it was because she learnt how to love in spite of full clearness of sight. She made no attempt to water down the difficulty. What she was up against was simply the impossible. Yet Jesus never asks the impossible.

Then the solution dawned on her. "Thou knowest that I shall never love my Sisters as Thou hast loved them, unless Thou lovest them Thyself within me, my dearest Master. It is because Thou dost desire to grant me this grace that Thou hast given a new commandment, and dearly do I cherish it, since it proves to me that it is Thy Will *to love in me* all those Thou dost bid me love."<sup>1</sup>

Thérèse, be it remembered, was naturally fastidious. Her senses responded swiftly to ugliness and beauty; her good breeding made her sensitive also to faults of manner. She was at a most intolerant age, and her critical faculty was acute above the average. With all this to sharpen her reactions, she turned round and cultivated those members of the community who most got on her nerves—so successfully that for a moment her own sisters were moved to jealousy. They were also the quickest to see what she was at, and it may be allowed that it was not an easy move to interpret. Apparently it occurred to nobody that a nun could by deliberate choice associate with those whom she liked least. And, indeed, without Thérèse's secret, such a course would have been merely foolhardy.

That secret she likened to going up to Heaven in the lift of God's arms. Her desire to be a Saint was as strong as ever, but she realized with unmincing frankness that she had not the scope to become a Saint of the Great Way. If she was to be a Saint, it could only be by some little byway, a small inconspicuous road suited to small inconspicuous people doing small inconspicuous things. "Pick up a pin from a motive of love," she wrote to a sister in another convent, "and you may thereby convert a soul.

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, pp. 162-3.

Jesus alone can make our deeds of such worth, so let us love Him with every fibre of our hearts.”<sup>1</sup>

To a novice distressed at her lack of courage the Saint once said: “You are complaining of what ought to be your greatest happiness. If you fought only when you felt ready for the fray, where would be your merit? What does it matter even if you have no courage, provided you behave as though you were really brave? If you feel too lazy to pick up a bit of thread, and yet do so for love of Jesus, you gain more merit than for a much nobler action done in an impulse of fervour. Instead of grieving, be glad that, by allowing you to feel your own weakness, Our Lord is furnishing you with an occasion to save a great number of souls.”<sup>2</sup>

“When I am weak, then am I strong,” said St. Paul. That is the heart of the Little Way, to leave self and fall back upon God. To live by His life is to make oneself a channel of His love and wisdom. It is to live with God as a tiny child with its father, expecting nothing from ourselves but everything from Him. By recalling us to this ancient teaching Thérèse made it possible to alter the course of history. She demonstrated a new power over circumstance, at the moment when circumstances threaten to overwhelm the vitality of the human person. What she wrote of other Saints is at least as true of herself, the Little Saint who is, in fact, one of the greatest in the family of Heaven:

“‘Give me a lever, and a fulcrum on which to rest it,’ said Archimedes, ‘and I will lift the world.’ But what this scientist could not obtain because his request had a merely material end without reference to God, the Saints have obtained in all its fullness. The Almighty has given them, as a fulcrum to lean upon, Himself—*Himself alone*—and for a lever, the prayer that inflames with the fire of love. And thus they have uplifted the world—thus do the Saints who still combat on earth continue to raise it and will continue to raise it till the end of time.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.







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